

The Efficacy of Awkwardness in Contemporary Participatory Performance

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on contemporary participatory performance in which participation is facilitated awkwardly, and in which awkward modes of participation are welcomed and encouraged. My use of the term 'awkward' here is not so much in reference to embarrassment, uneasiness, or social faux-par, though I do observe and critically respond to such phenomena throughout. Instead, the term 'awkward' is predominantly employed as an adjective in line with the dictionary definition 'causing difficulty; hard to do or deal with' or 'not smooth or graceful; ungainly'. Such awkwardness is framed as productive because of its disruptive relation with the smooth running of inter-relational encounters. These disruptions, I argue, in turn encourage critical reflection on our co-presence with others without removing us from that co-presence. Thus it allows for necessary affective and critical work to occur within the participatory performance itself as opposed to being delegated to those not involved and encountering the performances through secondary sources.

This focus on awkwardness in contemporary participatory performance occurs in response to what art critic Claire Bishop and others have defined as the 'Social Turn' in art and performance. This 'turn' refers to the increased critical, curatorial and cultural attention given to socially engaged, participatory and relational art practices since the late 1990s. The key aim of this project is to refocus this attention onto practitioners that, in my reading, have a productively awkward relation with its rhetoric, ideologies and socio-politics. My approach to these practices is often supported by the writings of Slavoj Žižek, especially his employment and supplement of Lacanian psychoanalysis. His theories of the 'big Other' and its 'super-egoic injunctions', of over-identification, of the 'real', 'symbolic' and 'imaginary' registers that structure our reality are worked-through as I develop my own theories of agency, reality and fantasy, desire, and socio-political efficacy through critical engagement with awkward participatory performance.

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Preface

The Role of Dyspraxia in this Thesis

I am diagnosed as having dyspraxia and, according to my diagnostic report, have particular difficulties with executive functioning and imposing order on activities.¹ Dyspraxia was formally known as ‘clumsy child syndrome’ and according to psychologist David Grant, clumsiness is its ‘most obvious aspect’.² My own difficulties with planning and order lead to a visible clumsiness in terms of writing. I was diagnosed during my Masters as a consequence of tutors noticing issues around clarity and structure in essays, and the frequent occurrence of typographical errors. However, writing is not the only activity affected by my condition. Grant describes dyspraxia as a layering of a ‘small visible part’ and a ‘very considerable hidden portion’.³

The visible part in the case of dyspraxia is the element of clumsiness and associated difficulties with motor coordination. The hidden aspect is the underlying difficulties with attention, memory and some tasks requiring perceptual skills.⁴

In my experience, these ‘underlying aspects’ have the potential to cause awkwardness in social situations. The difficulties are accentuated due to the hidden nature of the disability. Problems arising from these aspects can be

¹ Mazahir Mohamedal, *Working with Dyslexia: Dyslexia Assessment Consultancy, Confidential Diagnostic Assessment Report*, 29th September 2009.

² David Grant, ‘What is dyspraxia?’ in *That’s the Way I think: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADHD Explained* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 50-64 (p. 50).

³ Grant, p. 50.

⁴ Grant, p. 50.

mistakenly perceived as a result of laziness, imperviousness or intentional antagonism. In her writing on dyspraxia in *Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Positive Responses to Specific Learning Differences* Sharon Drew addresses such challenges in relation to 'certain learning situations' that 'can be difficult or uncomfortable'.⁵ Drew gives the example of difficulties in 'participating in discussions' which lead 'to an apparent unwillingness to join in, or making contributions that do not seem relevant'.⁶ Drew's reference to challenges in 'joining in' demonstrates that there is a potentially awkward relationship between dyspraxia and participation. The word 'awkward' is apt here in relation to dyspraxia when defined, following the Oxford English Dictionary, in terms of a person who lacks 'dexterity or skill in performing their part; clumsy in action, bungling'.⁷

The aim of this preface is, firstly, to foreground the role of this awkwardness in terms of motivating and guiding my research and its methodologies. A key part of my research involves my own participation or collaboration in the projects and performances that I write about. Thus I briefly discuss the risk that, due to my dyspraxia, I bring the heightened potential for awkwardness with me. Secondly, this preface discusses the role of clumsy approaches to writing when documenting and reflecting upon experiences of awkward participatory performance. The preface is not, however, meant as an

⁵ Sharon Drew, 'Dyspraxia', in *Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Positive Responses to Specific Learning Differences* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), pp. 91-123 (p. 109).

⁶ Drew, p. 109.

⁷ 'Awkward', *Oxford English Dictionary*
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/13971?redirectedFrom=awkward#eid>,
[accessed 10 December 2011].

extended version of the 'Specific Learning Difficulties Cover Note' that accompanied the submission of this thesis, in which examiners are asked to 'mark exam scripts sympathetically, ignoring dyslexic/dyspraxic errors and focusing on content and understanding of the subject'.⁸ Rather than prompting 'sympathetic' approaches to my condition, my aim is to highlight the important role that dyspraxia played in my research and in my written accounts of that research. It suggests that instead of overlooking 'dyspraxic errors', the reader should be open to the idea that such clumsiness plays an appropriate, integral and productive role in a PhD on the efficacy of awkwardness in participatory performance.

In taking this position, I align myself with the recent (15 years) concept of neurodiversity, which emerges from writings by sociologist Judy Singer.⁹

Singer writes:

The rise of neurodiversity takes postmodern fragmentation one step further. Just as the postmodern era sees every once too solid belief melt into air, even our most taken-for-granted – that we all more or less see, feel, touch, hear, smell, and sort information, in more or less the same way (unless visibly disabled) – are being dissolved.¹⁰

A neurodiverse approach to dyspraxia means reframing elements that are usually defined as dysfunctional as being merely differences. It also means suggesting ways of being open to those differences, and of encouraging

⁸ 'Specific Learning Difficulties Cover Note', submitted with thesis.

⁹ Judy Singer, "'Why can't you be normal for once in your life?' From a "problem with no name" to the emergence of a new category of difference' in *Disability Discourse*, ed. by Mairian Corker and Sally French (Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 59-67.

¹⁰ Singer, p. 64.

positive approaches to those differences. The first part of this preface addresses the former of these approaches. It suggests that participatory performances that are open to awkwardness are also open to people with awkward modes of being (such as dyspraxia). It also suggests that writing and research on participation that implicitly frames awkwardness as dismissible or problematic is complicit in creating barriers to people with an awkward mode of being who want to produce and perform participatory projects. The second part of this preface engages in a reframing of attributes of my neurodiversity that are presumptively categorised as problematic by proposing that dyspraxic writing be approached as productively performative.

Dyspraxic Methodologies

In *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Avant-Garde* Amelia Jones describes her 'affinity with the time, place, and activities of the New York Dada group' that she researches that is 'personal as well as intellectual'.¹¹ She explains:

As a sufferer of panic disorder, my *descriptions* of their neurasthenic responses are thus openly admitted to be *projections*, empathetic attempts to inhabit, and also to identify with, they're anxious, sometimes downright disorderly and antisocial behaviour and creative expressions. Anxiety is my mode of being.¹²

¹¹ Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Avant-Garde* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2004), p. 28

¹² Jones, p. 28

Jones' approach acts, to a certain extent, as a precedent for my own. I also admit to a personal identification with the awkward strategies and outcomes of the participatory projects I discuss due to my own experiences with dyspraxia. The 'underlying difficulties with attention', 'memory' and perception described by Grant can lead to misunderstanding, inappropriateness or, as Drew notes, withdrawal or irrelevancy in social situations. Each of these attributes has a clear connection to being, or causing awkwardness. In other words, dyspraxia means that there are times and situations in which awkwardness is my mode of being. Hence my project involves an inhabitation and identification that connects my engagement with awkwardness to Jones' engagement with anxiety. Whilst Jones identifies with the experiences and behaviours of the individuals that she writes about, I recognise and am drawn to awkward situations because of my awkward mode of being. It is important to disclaim this because of the dominant research method of this PhD project, which relies heavily on my own participation in the participatory projects I discuss. Whilst, unlike Jones, I would not describe my descriptions of awkwardness as projections, it could be argued that my dyspraxia might make me directly complicit in that awkwardness or even an instigator of it.

There is, therefore, a potential problematic role of dyspraxia in my methodology. This problematic approach would involve me contributing to or triggering awkward situations in participatory art and performance projects and accounting for the efficacy of that awkwardness. However, the majority of the thesis focuses on awkwardness as a strategy or tactic for producing particular efficacies. In general, the potential for awkwardness is built into the

projects I discuss and does not rely on an individual with an occasional awkward mode of being to trigger or perpetuate that awkwardness. The exception to this is Chapter 3, in which I do discuss awkwardness as a mode of being and as a contingent outcome of particular individuals being involved in particular situations. In this case, those individuals were members of the art group a.a.s, my long-term collaborator Luke Ferris (who also has dyspraxia), and myself. Thus this chapter allows me to test the limits of my methodology and addresses the potentially problematic approach mentioned above. I reach the important conclusion that participatory practices that embrace contingent awkwardness are also important to my research and my key arguments.

As I have stated, dyspraxia can be aptly described as an awkward mode of being. This awkward mode of being leads to a wealth of experience of awkward situations and, in turn, of different responses to awkwardness. This experience suggests that in most situations attempts are made to reduce, overcome or ignore awkwardness. However, my personal identification with awkwardness means that I have an invested interest in situations in which it is invited, welcomed, and maintained. The role of dyspraxia in relation to my methodology is connected to a heightened sensitivity to these different responses to awkwardness. It means that, as stated, I am not only interested in contemporary participatory performance practices in which awkwardness is pursued, but also in the way awkwardness is handled once it arises. This relates to the key contribution that this thesis makes, which is to identify exclusions and blind spots in the discourses that surround the social turn in art and performance.

I argue that one of the exclusions of the discourse around the social turn in art and performance is participatory practice that trigger, pursue or embrace awkwardness. The exclusion of such practices risks producing or reinforcing barriers to those for whom awkwardness is a mode of being, hindering them from producing or participating in socially engaged, relational and participatory practices. My dyspraxia means I am personally invested in highlighting such barriers.

Dyspraxic Writing

This section of my preface is not meant as a defence of any typos or issues with clarity that might remain in this thesis as a consequence of my dyspraxia. Instead it offers a rationale for their aptness. I suggest that such mishaps maintain a stylistic and performative fidelity to the clumsiness and awkwardness of my experiences. They go some way to meeting the 'challenge' that Peggy Phelan suggests performance brings to writing by discovering a 'way for repeated words to become performative utterances'.¹³ I understand this as a prompt to engage with the way in which writing on performance can *re-perform* elements of a performance as well as *describing* them. Such writing reproduces the tones, styles, and experiences of the performances it describes. Thus writing on awkward performance could itself be awkward.

¹³ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 149.

For this reason I had contemplated intentionally leaving many of the writerly mishaps that occur as a result of dyspraxia in the thesis. This would have been with the intention of re-performing interruptions to the smooth flow of interactivity and communication that the practices I discuss pursue, facilitate and embrace. The difficulty would have been in signposting this intentionality in order to avoid the risk of submitting a thesis that appeared to have not gone through required proofreading processes. This is further complicated by the ambiguous relationship that awkwardness has with intentionality and capability. In many of the situations I describe in this thesis awkwardness is triggered or heightened due to the way interactions and experiences challenge our readings of the authority, capability and intentions of a performer or artist. Awkwardness in these projects is rarely neatly framed and signposted. Thus a written account of these projects that aimed to re-perform their awkwardness would also need to disrupt the reader's experience of the authority, capability and intentions of the writer. The writerly clumsiness that results from dyspraxia could enable such re-performance. However, clear signposting would undermine this experience of ambiguity.

The majority of this thesis is not performative in this way. However, by introducing the performative potential of dyspraxic writing, I hope to guide the way the reader accounts for any dyspraxic moments that do encounter. I have gone through the rigorous process of identifying and correcting typographic, structural, formatting and tonal deviances. This was done with the understanding, developed through past experience, that even after such processes are completed, some elements of dyspraxia will remain. Rather

than overlooking such elements, the reader is prompted to allow them to exist as momentary indulgences in performing and triggering awkwardness. This should provide further clarification and insight into the particular type of awkwardness addressed in this thesis and its efficaciously disruptive relationship with authorial status and communication.

Introduction

There are two serendipitously productive moments that triggered and then reframed the key thread of the research and argumentation of this thesis. I will outline these moments here as a means of briefly introducing my definition of the terms ‘participation’ and ‘awkwardness’. The first occurred on 25 February 2010 during the ‘Participation and Activism’ panel discussion as part of the Birkbeck Centre for Contemporary Theatre’s *Theatre Conversations* in London, UK. Ali Tomkinson spoke about the participatory programmes that she was involved with at the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), a venue for theatre and performance in Battersea in Wandsworth, South London that declares itself to be a ‘place where everyone plays a role in inventing the future of theatre’.¹ Discussing the venues outreach work with schools, Tomkinson describes what happens when an artist “hasn’t got great facilitation skills”, giving the example of “one of our artists (...) who we describe as looking, in school, (...) like an old fashioned geography teacher.”² In these situations the BAC “back fill them with people who actually are really great at facilitation”.³

I reference this moment of Tomkinson’s presentation here, at the very beginning of my thesis, because it played a key role in inspiring a series of questions that fuelled my research. These questions were triggered through Tomkinson’s allusion to the idea of a ‘great’ facilitator of participation on the

¹ Battersea Arts Centre, ‘About’ <https://www.bac.org.uk/content/15969/about_us/about_us/about_us> [accessed 10 October 2014].

² Ali Tomkinson, ‘Participate’, *Theatre Conversations: Participation and Activism* < <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/our-research/bcct/projects/theatre-conversations>> [accessed 12 December 2012].

³ Tomkinson.

one hand, and an excluded, 'awkward' facilitator of participation on the other. My experience as an artist and researcher with dyspraxia means I identify, to some extent, with the predicament of the 'old-fashioned geography teacher' style artist who 'hasn't got great facilitation skills'. The core question that emerged in response to this is: How might 'awkward' facilitation of participation be reframed as 'great'? Each of my chapters goes some way to answering this question, but it does so in response to a different framing of the term 'participation' in relation to theatre, art, and performance.

Although Tomkinson described the relationship between theatre and participation as being 'very interconnected' at the BAC, the participatory work that she is engaged in is not framed as a performance practice itself. For Tomkinson 'participation' refers to building, developing, and sustaining relationships and 'strategic partnerships' between the theatre and performance that occurs at the BAC and children and young people in the borough of Wandsworth. I, on the other hand, am not researching programmes of participation put in place to get people involved in theatre, performance, and the arts. The 'participation' that I describe is an integral part of the performances and artworks that I engage with. Specifically, in this thesis 'participation' refers to live, co-present interactions between artists, performers and participants and the facilitation of co-present interactions between different participants. The words and actions of participants are deemed to be part of the performances and artworks that they participate in, and are not merely responses to an artwork or performance. My use of other terms such as 'interactive' or 'collaborative' throughout the thesis all have this

definition at their root. Words other than 'participation' are generally selected based on their use by the artists I discuss or the writings I respond to.

Examples of participation that I have experienced as part of my research for this thesis include avant-garde drag performer David Hoyle having spontaneous verbal altercations with his audience members in various performances at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, London; art groups a.a.s and Reactor collaborating with participants to pursue fantastical goals or build and maintain fantastical worlds in *Xe54* (Walsall 2011) and *Total Ghaos* (Nottingham 2005); performance artist and photographer Bjørn Venø silently and authoritatively selecting audience members and then attempting to strip them naked in *Outside In* (Flying Dutchman, London 2014); Matthew De Kersaint Giraudeau constructing one-to-one performance installations that flicker abruptly between inviting and denying interaction (*I'm here. You're Here. Let's Discourse!*, Open School East, London 2014); Adrian Howells bathing, hugging, and feeding (optionally) nude participants in *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding* (BAC, 2011); Markus Coates using shamanic methods to communicate with badgers in order to assist people with their personal problems in *Spirit Caravan: mobile personal consulting* (South Bank Centre Square, London, 2008), and myself persuading audience members to perform as the corpses of their dead friends in *Weird Séance* (Ipswich, 2014). Whilst I do not address all these experiences in this thesis, they each contributed to the development of my overall argument for the efficacy of awkwardness. I participated, in some way, in each of these

examples and have done so in almost all the performances and artworks that I discuss throughout the thesis.

The second moment that is useful for introducing and defining the core question of this thesis occurred during a conversation at an evening of performances that I curated called *Live Art Dogging* (Nottingham, 26 January 2013). *Live Art Dogging* was the third of a series of 'Reactor Halls' events that were facilitated by Nottingham-based art collective Reactor in their large studio space at Primary. Primary is an ex-primary school that has been repurposed as an 'artist led-space that exists to support creative research and to develop new ways of engaging audiences'.⁴ It opened in 2012. In each Reactor Halls event a different artist or art group was invited to curate an evening. I was approached by Reactor and proposed the idea of an evening of performances that were primarily for one participant at a time, but in which other people in the space could observe that interaction, or at least some element of it. My aim was to bring together a collection of performances that experimented with intimacy and voyeurism. This was influenced by performance artist and scholar Dominic Johnson's observation that often the encounters we experience in one to one performances are 'partly boring, partly threatening, possibly embarrassing or uncomfortable, and then the difficulties resolve themselves into an experience of beauty or wonder, however slight.'⁵ Johnson suggests that this is 'a neat description of intimacy

⁴ Primary, 'About', <http://www.weareprimary.org/about/> [accessed 10 September 2014].

⁵ Dominic Johnson, in an interview with Rachel Zerihan, *The Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide to one-on-one performance*,

itself, as a situation that aims (to varying extents) at pleasure, but necessarily involves less pleasurable eventualities'.⁶ My intention, influenced by my academic interest in awkwardness, was to curate an event that foregrounded those discomforts and 'less pleasurable eventualities' by undermining the element of privacy that much one to one performance embraces. Hence the titular reference to 'dogging' - a discreetly organised gathering in a public space (often in car-parks) in which people can watch or participate in sexual activities.

In *Live Art Dogging* attendees were invited to participate in intimate encounters that were, to varying degrees, on display. There were fourteen artists presenting at *Live Art Dogging*. Performances included Live Artist Traci Kelly's *Touch Vs. Touch*, in which participants were invited up onto a large table to hold a pose with Kelly that included some form of physical interaction and lasted for a minute. Kelly had a shot of rum between each interaction, which had an obvious effect on her approach to physical interactivity and on her ability to hold the pose. By the end of her performance Kelly had to be carried off of the table. Ellie Watmough performed *Cath's Community Cupcake Competition*. 'Cath' (Watmough's patronisingly strict matriarchal persona) approached attendees who were then invited to join Cath at a small table where they would carefully and elaborately decorate a pre-cooked cupcake. As they selected and placed edible decorations on the sponge, Cath mixed small talk with tenuous interpretations and thinly disguised critiques of

http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/Rachel_Zerihan.html [accessed 11 May 2012], pp. 38-40 (p. 39).

⁶ Johnson, p. 39.

their creative decisions. After the participant had finished and left Cath crushed or ate the cake and, later in the event, found the participant and handed the remains back to them in a clear plastic bag. Performance artist Simon Raven set a table and chairs up for a romantic meal with one participant. The table was covered in a white table-cloth on top of which was a meal hidden beneath a metal plate cover. Once the participant had joined him the meal was revealed to be a large pile of snow (it was snowing at the time in Nottingham). The snow was promptly made into snowballs that Raven and his participant threw violently at those watching. In Bruce Abestos's *Bruce Abestos as Justine Boobier* it was me that was coerced into participating, forced, as the curator, to negotiate with him as he threatened to jump from a dangerously high mezzanine in the room. Chloe Cooper, Luke Ferris, Michael Pinchbeck, Earth Rod, Kimbal Bumsted, Matthew Hawthorn, Amelia Beavis-Harrison, Owen Parry, Andy Barrett and myself also presented performances and installations.

An example of a contribution that neatly met my intentions for the event was Owen Parry's *Touching Feeling*, a performance that has been performed in various venues and festivals internationally since May 2011.⁷ Parry wandered around the space asking people if they wanted to participate in his performance. If they agreed it was explained to them that Parry would close his eyes and touch them wherever he wanted to. If they wanted the

⁷ Cruising for Art by Brian Lobel, Psi Utrecht, The Netherlands (May 2011); Cruising for Art, Vogue Fabrics, London (9 Dec 2011); Cruising for Art, Basement, Brighton (10 Dec 2011); Live Art Dogging, Reactor Halls, Nottingham (Jan 2013); In Between Time, Cruising for Art, Bristol (Feb 2013); ANTI Festival, Kuopio, Finland, (Sept 2013); Nuit Blanche, Brussels, Belgium (Oct 2013).

performance to stop, they were to slap him as hard as they could. Parry could also stop whenever he wanted to. This was a physically intimate performance that immersed participants in a spattering of desire, resistance, provocation, and surrender. I was told that Parry did not hesitate to touch participant's genitals early on in the encounter. They were invited to experience an overlap of heightened physical sensitivity and cerebral questioning of their responsibilities and agency. For me, it invited an insistent speculation on Parry's motivations and a questioning of what he wanted from participants. Was he hoping for them to be compliant or resistant? Were they meant to be providers or recipients of pleasure? *Touching Feeling* was enticingly ambiguous in its purpose: overlapping elements of social and psychological experimentation with a pursuit of the unsettled pleasures of publically performed physical intimacy. As with all the performances, others in the space might have caught a glimpse of the interaction as they drank at the bar, chatted with other attendees, or engaged in the other participatory performances and installations on offer. They might have come close and gawped at the interaction, making participants aware of the potential for their actions and responses to be enjoyed and judged. They might have made it visibly clear that the interaction held no interest for them as spectators. This sense of awkwardness, in which we are in close proximity to the ambiguous desires of others, and in which we might question our own position in relation to fulfilling those desires, is a cornerstone of my engagement with awkward participatory art and performance throughout this thesis.

On his website Parry describes his performance in terms that match my own contextualisation of *Live Art Dogging*:

Despite its reputation for creating intimate and confessional encounters, what is now widely referred [sic] to as 'one on one performance' either seems to be championed for its potential to create 'real' encounters between performer/spectator, or in other instances it is limited to comparisons with models of exchange in the service industry. But what about the more sleazy and illegitimate operations at stake in the performer-participant transaction?⁸

A pursuit of the sleazy and the illegitimate lay at the root of the curatorial decisions I made in terms of spatial arrangement, scheduling, and lighting. This was partly based on maintaining a fidelity to the experiences offered by dogging. Whilst it was up to individual artists to respond to the idea of intimate encounters and voyeurism, it was mine to address the wider experiences of attending a 'dogging' event. I was interested in the potential for disorganisation in 'dogging' events; in the difficulty of knowing exactly when and where sexual activities would begin, of waiting, of getting bored, of just missing something, or of having to choose between two different experiences or spectacles. Anecdotal evidence collected in the run-up to the event suggested that occasionally a dogging event consists of two or three men drinking cans of lager, engaging in small talk, and waiting for a sign that there something worth watching is about to occur. Some of the decisions that I made as organiser and curator of *Live Art Dogging* were partially motivated by a desire to facilitate similar experiences. All the performances occurred in the same room, which also contained the bar. There was a schedule, but at

⁸ Owen Parry, 'Touching Feeling', <http://owengparry.com/#/touching-feeling/4557695875>, [accessed 10 December 2013].

various points there was more than one performance sharing the space. There were no physical barriers around individual performances and they were not individually lit – fluorescent strip-lights providing a stark lighting across the entire space. Artists, participants, voyeurs, and non-participating attendees were equally exposed. I loosely structured the event so that for the first hour not much happened. This led to smatterings of anticipatory small talk and an atmosphere of restrained impatience. When the performances did begin to occur they were sparsely scattered, both temporally and spatially, often situated towards the edges and corners of the room. I hosted with a mix of raucous joviality and abrupt boorishness, frequently using a microphone to badger attendees to donate money for artist's fees and repeatedly and unjustifiably reminding everyone that I had recently become a father. I view my mode of curatorship and hosting as matching Parry's pursuit of illegitimacy because of its antithetical relationship towards the experiences usually expected from social, performance, and art events.

During the evening one of the artists, who knew about my research commented that he felt that there was something awkward about the event, but that it was not the sort of awkwardness he was expecting. This prompted me to think through the different modes of awkwardness that the event facilitated in order to develop a clearer understanding of what I was referring to when I described a participatory performance as 'awkward'. I assumed that the artist was referring to the stilted atmosphere created through the structure, setting, and host personality when he described the event as 'awkward'. This prompted me to rethink awkwardness not only in terms of shameful mishaps

and cringe-inspiring social faux-pas, but as a methodology. I am particularly interested in the potential of participants to question the capabilities and authority of those in charge when participatory art and performance is created, facilitated, hosted, and maintained awkwardly. This framing of awkwardness as a methodology links to its etymology, in which 'awk' translates as 'backwards, perverse, clumsy'.⁹ This etymological definition of awkwardness aptly frames my decision to include Andy Barrett's performance *Guilty Pleasures* (2013) and schedule it as the finale of *Live Art Dogging*. *Guilty Pleasures* was a five-minute performance nestled in the corner of the room. Barrett sat naked eating cake as the majority of the attendees stood with their backs to him looking at Asbestos, who lay sprawled on a pile of cardboard boxes on the floor (having asked the audience to close their eyes whilst he climbed down the stairs from the mezzanine and laid himself down beneath the spot where he was previously stood, hence clumsily feigning the jump). As Asbestos' performance finished and the audience turned around, Barrett began masturbating (whilst continuing to gorge himself on cake) and continued until he ejaculated. Barrett and Parry were the only artists of the fourteen who presented work at *Live Art Dogging* that explicitly and physically addressed the potential 'sleaziness' of dogging. Despite the fact that I gave frequent warnings throughout the event that Barrett would be masturbating in the corner at the end, many attendees displayed disbelief when it actually occurred, and quickly left the room when he started. I was enthusiastic about Barrett's inclusion in the event. It ensured an unapologetic, abrupt, and

⁹ 'Awkward', *Oxford Dictionaries* <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/awkward>> [accessed 20 May 2011].

awkward slippage from a series of witty, conceptual engagements with dogging that disavowed its organisation around carnal pleasure, to the unadulterated experience of seeing a man clearly enjoying being watched as he masturbated. Thus the awkwardness of the inclusion of Barrett's performance in *Live Art Dogging* did not emerge through its inappropriateness (putting aside the fact that the venue used to be a primary school). It was awkward because *Guilty Pleasures* engaged directly with the event's explicit references (sex acts in front of a crowd) and ignored its implied suggestions (to reframe 'dogging' as an analogy for structuring relations between performers, participants and spectators).

To summarise and recap, the basic question triggered and supplemented through the moments discussed above is 'What might be 'great' about awkward methods of creating and facilitating participatory art and performance?' This forms the basis of the research of this thesis, where 'great' refers to the efficacy of awkwardness in terms of ethical and social politics. The thesis also engages with the efficacy of being an awkward participant and of writing about participatory art and performance awkwardly. I will refer to these engagements in my section on my research methodologies below, which includes a return to the definition of 'awk' as 'backwards, perverse, clumsy'.

These opening paragraphs have introduced five interlinked modes of awkwardness, each of which is returned to in detail in this thesis. I will list these here, and refer to moments in my thesis in which I address them. The

first is illustrated through the figure of the unwelcome, 'geography teacher' style of school-based outreach work. Awkwardness here is related to an apparent dysfunction in someone's mode of being with others. In my writing on a.a.s' project *Xe54* I refer to the dysfunctional relations that occurred between collaborators due to a clash of different approaches and awkward modes of being. Core member Stuart Tait writes that this resulted from the fact that the core members of a.a.s are 'four, intense people (two men, two women) who make very demanding work'.¹⁰ The second, exemplified in Owen Parry's contribution to *Live Art Dogging*, relates to our experience of other's desires, and a questioning of our own role in relation to those desires. I return to this in my writing on *Reactor*, in which I discuss the potential for participants to experience paranoia in response to motivations behind the activities they participate in. The third is related to the abrupt shift in tone encapsured in the curation of *Live Art Dogging* and the scheduling of *Guilty Pleasures*. At various points in my thesis I focus on abrupt shifts and changes and the awkwardness related to their decontextualizing effects. Hoyle's unexpected switches between conviviality and antagonism is particular important because of its relation to key arguments in existing theoretical responses to the ethics and politics of participatory art and performance. The fourth example of awkwardness in the above writing relates to my curation of *Live Art Dogging*. Here awkwardness arises through a questioning of the motivations and capabilities of those who are in charge of the participatory activities people are involved in. This idea is returned to at various points throughout the

¹⁰ Stuart Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration', in *A thousand lines of flight – Anarchist Network Conference*, Loughborough University, 3-5 September 2012 <<http://stuarttait.com/writing/molecularpaper/>> [accessed 5/12/2014].

thesis, and relates to the potential for participatory performance to trouble the presumed relationship between authority and expertise. Finally, *Guilty Pleasures* provides an example of an awkwardness that is attached to ignoring the unspoken rules of a social system. In the following section I will further clarify the way I define the term 'awkwardness' using Kotsko's frameworks of 'everyday', 'radical', and 'cultural' awkwardness. I then engage further with Kotsko's text in order to introduce the efficacies of awkwardness that underpin engagement with it throughout my thesis.

Adam Kotsko's Three Types of Awkwardness

Adam Kotsko's essay *Awkwardness* discusses the humorous exploration of social discomfort in various recent television shows and films, with most attention given to the U.S version of *The Office* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and the films of Judd Apatow, including *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up*.¹¹ Whilst these case-studies, limited to acted, pre-planned scenarios made for television, DVD and the cinema, bare little resemblance to my own engagement with live participatory art and performance, Kotsko's discussion of the potential efficacy of awkwardness is useful. This is, firstly because Kotsko breaks down awkwardness into three separate categories. He uses the terms 'everyday awkwardness', 'radical awkwardness' and 'cultural awkwardness' to define the three modes of awkwardness he identifies and their relationship to the social situations in which they emerge. 'Everyday awkwardness' occurs when an individual breaks a socially agreed rule. This mode of awkwardness relies on the presumption that each person in a certain

¹¹ Adam Kotsko, *Awkwardness* (Ropley: 0-Books, 2010).

scenario knows the rules of the social and cultural context in which they find themselves. It is important to note that these are not necessarily the explicitly stated rules or laws of the situation, but more often the ‘unspoken norms of a community’.¹² Whilst we might instinctively, in this scenario, blame the awkward individual for being ignorant of such norms, we can also use the awkward moment of ‘break down’ to move towards an understanding of what those norms are, how they came into being, how they are perpetuated, and, perhaps most importantly, who and what they exclude. In Chapter 4, I discuss performance artist David Hoyle’s outbursts of antagonism in public scenarios originally framed as friendly, or sudden shifts from uncomfortably mischievous interventions to acts of attentive love and care. These moments are framed, firstly, as awkward due to their inappropriate emergence in public spaces, and secondly, in their abrasive relation to the rules of engagement (friendly or mischievous) that he himself seemed to have set up. This in turn positions Hoyle’s social practice as awkward in relation to the idea, implied in writings on the ‘social turn’ in art and performance, that social engagement should be *either* antagonistic *or* convivial. His refusal or inability to follow this suggests that such approaches to social engagement, whether they focus on antagonism or conviviality, exclude practitioners who embrace volatile improvisation, such as Hoyle.

According to Kotsko, ‘radical awkwardness arises when there doesn’t seem to be any norm governing a given situation at all’.¹³ This absence of governing norms often occurs when two differing sets of implied rules, etiquettes and

¹² Kotsko, p. 6.

¹³ Kotsko, p. 7.

‘unwritten shadows’ clash in the same space. Thus there is an anxiety about which set of rules to follow; whether to insist upon your own, clumsy attempt to adopt those of the other, or tentatively negotiate for an unspoken compromise. Kotsko suggests that it is ‘radical awkwardness’ that inspires ‘reactions far more dangerous than an uncomfortable grimace’, with ‘forced assimilation, segregation, and expulsion’ as potential strategies for ensuring that a ‘norm’ is established, and that that norm is your own and not the others.¹⁴ In Chapter 3 I allude to some clashes between art group a.a.s and my performance duo AuntyNazi, which emerged through what, in my experience, was the absence of ‘norms’ governing the *Xe54* project (2011) in which we collaborated. In a.a.s’ collaborative practice these norms are, ideally, developed and continually revised through collaboration, as opposed to existing prior to groups coming together and guiding the ways in which we collaborated. As hinted at in the above reference to a.a.s’ relationship with staff at Walsall Gallery, such strive towards openness is not always inviting, and can be experienced as ‘intense’ and ‘demanding’. AuntyNazi resisted assimilation into this ideology of perpetual malleability itself, repeatedly demanding structure and rules from a.a.s’. This is because our own collaborative approach relies on us positioning ourselves ignorantly or disobediently in relation to such structures and rules. This led to what Tait described as ‘glitches in communication that caused extreme tension between individuals, leading to new, anxious, work that was outside anything either

¹⁴ Kotsko, p. 8.

group usually produced'.¹⁵ This was the closest I have come to experience what Claire Bishop describes as 'relational antagonism'.¹⁶

Bishop's critical approach to social engagement, participatory, and collaborative is a key referent throughout this thesis. I return to her position towards the end of this introduction, and outline her approach more fully in Chapter 1. When Bishop uses the term 'relational antagonism' she is referring here to artworks such as Santiago Sierra's *Wall Enclosing a Space* (Venice Biennale, 2003) in which a wall was constructed that 'rendered the galleries inaccessible'.¹⁷ Only visitors with a Spanish passport could enter, via the back of the gallery. Bishop favours such projects over more convivial and benevolent modes of interactivity due to their apparent adherence to Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's theory of a 'fully functioning democracy' in which 'friction and antagonisms between people' are maintained in order to continually 'draw up' and bring into debate 'the frontiers between different positions'.¹⁸ However, Kotsko's definition of radical awkwardness, and my own experience of the fluxing frontiers and frameworks of *Xe54*, suggest that the actual experience of this 'fully functioning democracy' is not being irritated or angered through inaccessibility (as in *Wall Enclosing a Space*) but feeling awkward. Neither party was 'antagonised' in the collaborative exploits of *Xe54*. There were, as Tait points out, anxieties and tension but, for me,

¹⁵ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

¹⁶ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 120-127.

¹⁷ Bishop, *Installation Art*, p. 120.

¹⁸ Bishop, *Installation Art*, p. 119.

Xe54's fidelity to a politics of antagonism did not equate to the kinds of felt antagonistic experiences offered in the artworks Bishop favours.

Finally Kotsko outlines the concept of 'cultural awkwardness', an 'awkward kind of awkwardness' that arises 'when there seems to be a set of norms in force, but it feels somehow impossible to follow them or even fully know them'.¹⁹ I would argue that there are elements of 'cultural awkwardness' across my experiences with Hoyle, Reactor, a.a.s and the other performances I have participated and collaborated in. It is, however, within Reactor's haphazardly facilitated worlds of conspiratorial fantasies and totalitarian role-play that such impenetrable 'norms' are most prominently constructed and maintained. I discuss the experience of being immersed in their ramshackle systems of 'cultural awkwardness' in Chapter 5.

The Efficacy of Awkwardness

In this section I describe and extend Adam Kotsko's Heideggerian-influenced analogical use of a broken hammer.²⁰ This is because it is illustrative of my framing of the efficacy of awkwardness. Kotsko indulges this analogy in order to outline the way in which awkwardness emerges as a socio-politically productive affect and as a method for producing affects.

¹⁹ Kotsko, pp. 16-17.

²⁰ Kotsko, pp. 11-12.

Kotsko describes how Martin Heidegger's 'analysis of the structure of human existence' begins with 'what he calls "ordinary everydayness," which is characterised by essentially going with the flow'.²¹ In this state of 'ordinary everydayness' we 'interact with others in fairly stereotyped ways' and 'don't give much thought to any of it, because there's really no need to'.²² However, 'when things start to break down', we 'really need to step back and reflect on what has happened'.²³ Referring to Heidegger's nostalgia and penchant for the 'supposedly "authentic" peasant lifestyle' and consequent use of 'examples from that milieu', Kotsko states:²⁴

When I am working on something in the workshop, I don't really think of a hammer, for example, as anything more than a readily available tool. It is only when it breaks that it presents itself to me as something more than just its use to me.²⁵

In short, it is only when a hammer breaks and cannot be used that we might begin to think about what a hammer is. This is an example of what Kotsko describes as the kind of 'objective contemplation that philosophy and science have tended to put forward as the most authentic type of knowledge'.²⁶ However, the key Heideggerian concept that informs Kotsko's analysis is the argument that this is not the only type of knowledge. For Heidegger 'there is also the kind of intuitive knowledge or "know how" that gets us through our

²¹ Kotsko, p. 11.

²² Kotsko, p. 11.

²³ Kotsko, p. 11.

²⁴ Kotsko, p. 11.

²⁵ Kotsko, p. 12.

²⁶ Kotsko, p. 12.

day-to-day life'.²⁷ These different types of gaining and employing knowledge arise through different ways of 'standing in relation to the world' or being "attuned" to the world'.²⁸ As Kotsko points out, these different stances are collected together by Heidegger in a term translated as 'moods'.²⁹ Kotsko frames awkwardness as a type of Heideggerian 'mood' and makes an important distinction in relation to the differentiation between 'going with the flow' and 'breakdown-fuelled objective contemplation':

Awkwardness clearly fits with the general pattern of insight through breakdown, but unlike anxiety or boredom, it doesn't isolate the person who feels awkward – as I have already discussed, it does just the opposite: it spreads.³⁰

He goes on to summarise that 'awkwardness is a breakdown in our normal experience of social interaction while itself remaining irreducibly social'.³¹

Thus, when I talk about the awkward facilitation of participation and interactivity in the practices I engage with, Kotsko's framing of awkwardness as simultaneous social breakdown and social immersion is a key referent. When the social interactions of a participatory performance or relational artwork are facilitated awkwardly, participants, performers, artists, and theorists have an opportunity to diagnose the unspoken rules and frameworks of that social situation whilst continuing to participate in it. In summary, throughout my thesis I discuss performances in which participation, collaboration, and interactivity do not, I argue, run smoothly. They run

²⁷ Kotsko, p. 12.

²⁸ Kotsko, p. 12.

²⁹ Kotsko, p. 12.

³⁰ Kotsko, p. 15.

³¹ Kotsko, p. 15.

awkwardly. This is an awkwardness that emerges from openness to mismanagement and an inclusive approach towards non-normative modes of tangibility, precision, and conviviality.

Methodology

Following Kotsko's suggestion that awkwardness 'spreads', it is important to clarify the multiple, overlapping ways in which awkwardness spreads through the thesis: I address the ways that participation can be facilitated awkwardly and I address the way that participation can trigger awkward affects. Finally, as discussed in the preface to this thesis I approach awkwardness with my own awkward modes of researching, theorising, and analysing, and with potentially awkward tones, phrasing, and argumentation in my writing. This entails an overlap of my own writerly performance as a dyspraxic with a lightly engaged re-performance of the tones and affects I experienced through participating and collaborating in the projects I address. In terms of my research, throughout the thesis I rely on and foreground a methodological approach I describe as Collaborator/Performer-Participation-as-Research (C/PPaR), taking my cue from the term 'Spectator-Participation-as-Research' (SPaR) that Deidre Heddon, Helen Iball and Rachel Zerihan use to describe their work on One on One performance. Heddon, Iball, and Zerihan write that:

Practice-as-Research (PaR) usually refers to making performance but, given that One to One is usually participatory, here the practice is located in the experiential processes of reception: PaR becomes SPaR (Spectator-Participation-as-Research). This acronym intentionally signals the relational dynamic embedded in the One to One form, a

dynamic – or enfolding – that we unfold here.³²

The development of my arguments on awkwardness and participatory performance is also rooted in ‘experiential processes’. This experience is not just as a participant, but also as a collaborator in the construction of projects and playing key roles in their facilitation and maintenance. Whilst, in some of the projects I discuss, the roles between punters and performers are intentionally blurred, I have often had privileged access to the back-stories, bickerings, processes, and discussions through which projects emerged. Thus, whilst the methodology of my research is not strictly ‘PaR’, in that none of the projects I write about were instigated and built up by myself, I often had an insider position that meant I was privy to, if not part of, the performance making process. I should note that whenever I was involved in a project in a way that went beyond that offered to the public, the practitioners I worked with knew about my research project. Any time I have written about elements of projects not publically available, I have sent that writing through to the artist for their approval.

I have collaborated, performed, and actively participated in many of the practices that I discuss, and I have often done so awkwardly. This is key to my engagement with practices that Bishop describes as framing ‘intersubjective relations over detached opticality’.³³ I favour participatory art and performance that facilitates affective diagnosis that occurs during our

³² Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball, and Rachel Zerihan, ‘Come Closer: Confessions of Intimate Spectators in One to One Performance’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22:1, (120-133), 122.

³³ Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, *October*, 110 (Autumn 2004), 51-79 (61).

participation in it, not in response to the videos, images, and other secondary materials it produces. Further to my interest in the way that awkward interactivity forces diagnoses of that interactivity, I am interest in the looping, cumulative, feedback effect in which that diagnoses becomes itself an awkward intervention. Throughout this complex spreading and entangling of awkwardness and diagnoses the social interaction keeps going, but does not run smoothly. It is crucial for my theorisation to emerge from the midst of that entanglement. I then shuttle between reflections on the intricacies and efficacies of my experiences and theoretical engagement with theories of how participation *should* be facilitated (primarily the writings on the social turn in art and performance). These two points of engagement are triangulated with a theoretical allegiance to the psychoanalytic, cultural criticism of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's theory is essential to a critical engagement with the awkwardness of participatory performance because of his repeated focus on the awkward, interacting matrices of desiring, fantasizing, and barely tolerating subjects of the 21st century. At times the theorisations I use as a framework for my reflections on these projects might seem like an awkward choice, as if I am hammering square pegs in to round holes. My rationale for pursuing this methodology is not to reduce and reshape the pegs, but to widen the hole. In other words, my aim is to allow these performances to stretch the critical and theoretical approaches that I apply to them.

Claire Bishop's 'Lacanian Angle'

Of the various ways that art critic and historian Claire Bishop takes issue with what she defines the 'Social Turn' in art and performance (the increase in the production, curation, and facilitation of art and performance that frames and foregrounds social interaction),³⁴ the argument that I return to most often in this thesis emerges from an idea she had for an article that has remained unwritten. Reference to this unwritten piece occurred in an interview that followed the publication of her provocative *ArtForum* essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents'.³⁵ Bishop claims that for some time she has been tempted to write an article that would push the 'ethical question' that arises in response to collaborative and participatory practices 'a bit further, from a Lacanian angle'.³⁶ She goes on to opine that 'the best socially collaborative art does not derive from a super-egoic injunction to "love thy neighbour," but from the position of "do not give up on your desire"'.³⁷ She then rejects the potential of addressing this angle any further in writing. This is primarily because she is 'unconvinced of its ability to tell us much about contemporary art'.³⁸ However, the polemic position that lies beneath her proposition runs throughout Bishop's approaches to collaborative, participatory and socially engaged art. She returns briefly to her 'Lacanian angle' in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, in

³⁴ Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *ArtForum*, (February 2006) <http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=10274> [accessed 1 February 2009].

³⁵ Bishop, 'The Social Turn'.

³⁶ Bishop in Roche.

³⁷ Bishop in Roche.

³⁸ Bishop in Roche.

which she clarifies the importance of the distinction between pursuits of neighbourly love and pursuits of desire:

Instead of obeying a super-egoic injunction to make ameliorative art, the most striking, moving and memorable forms of participation are produced when artists act upon a gnawing social curiosity without the incapacitating restrictions of guilt. This fidelity to a singularised desire rather than to social consensus – enables this work to join a tradition of highly authored situations that fuse reality with carefully calculated artifice (...).³⁹

The development of my own arguments closely follows this assertion.

However, mine remains more explicitly related to theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (most often read through Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek) throughout, whereas his theories are not explicitly referenced throughout the rest of *Artificial Hells*.

The essential difference between the position I take and that which Bishop takes is located in her reference to the importance of pursuing guilt-free ‘singularised’ desire and ‘highly authored’ situations. Bishop references Lacan’s approach to Antigone in order to expand on her position, describing her as ‘an instance of a subject who does not relinquish her desire: she persists in what she has to do, however uncomfortable or difficult this task may be’.⁴⁰ In Sophocles’ play *Antigone*, Antigone obstinately disobeys Creon’s ruling that the body of her brother, Polynices, must be left to rot

³⁹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 39.

⁴⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 39.

outside the city walls, by burying her brother herself.⁴¹ Importantly, Creon's ruling and punishment of Antigone is not presented as arbitrary cruelty, but as enacted for the 'good' of the city, Thebes, and its inhabitants. This means Antigone is entirely isolated in her defiance. Even her sister, Ismene, encourages her acquiescence. The punishment for her actions is to be buried alive in a cave, and consequently she hangs herself. In response to this act of radical defiance Lacan asks, rhetorically: 'Is there anyone who doesn't evoke Antigone whenever there is a question of a law that causes conflict in us even though it is acknowledged by the community to be a just law?'⁴² However, whilst Lacan's framing of Antigone's total defiance of the community goes some way to supporting Bishop's call for 'singularised desire' to be prioritised over 'social consensus', Bishop overlooks the fact that Antigone's actions occur in line with the relentless pursuance of a cause. Antigone insists that Creon's ruling is against the gods, and her sacrifice is for a greater cause than the 'good' that Creon seeks for Thebians.⁴³

For Žižek, however, the real weight and impact of Antigone's defiance lies not in the adherence to a divine ruling, but in the impenetrability of her motivations. It is not so much divine law that Antigone sacrifices herself for, as much as an ambiguous, and 'unconditional' cause.⁴⁴ In doing so she emerges

⁴¹ Sophocles, 'Antigone' in *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles, (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), pp. 55-128.

⁴² Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 243.

⁴³ Lacan, p. 258.

⁴⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), p. 15.

as a key example of Žižek's understanding of the experience of subjectivity as a 'primordial passivity':

... a sentiency, of responding, of being infinitely indebted and responsible to the call of an Otherness which never acquires positive features, but always remains withdrawn, the trace of its own absence.⁴⁵

For Bishop for an artist following Antigone's example, it is more ethical to 'act in accordance with his or her (unconscious) desire than to modify his or her behaviour for the eyes of the Big Other (society, family, Law, expected norms)'.⁴⁶ My own approach, on the other hand, follows Žižek's focus on desire as emerging through our relationship with murky, impenetrable causes and elusive authorial figures. In summary, for Bishop participatory and collaborative art and performance should be grounded in the ruthless pitting of individual desire (the artist's) against the implicit and explicit consensus of those collaborating. For me, collaborative and participatory art should foreground the emergence of desires through our relationship to Otherness.

Each of my chapters has a thread of argument that responds to Bishop's position on desire and neighbourly love. Sometimes this thread dominates the chapter, and sometimes it supports it or is implied through its propositions. My first chapter introduces the key arguments of the social turn. I address the writings of Nicolas Bourriaud, Shannon Jackson, and Jen Harvie, through each of their approaches to the relational installations of Rirkrit Tiravanija. This chapter does not explicitly respond to Bishop's desire/neighbourly love

⁴⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 153.

⁴⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 39.

stance, but refers to and expands the ways in which her diagnosis of artworks' and performances' ethical positions and affective frameworks often overlooks the potential complexities of the experiences on offer.

Chapter 2 opens with a brief recollection of my experience of Adrian Howell's one on one performance *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding* (April 2011). This is offered as an example of a performance in which the line between caring for others and pursuing individual desires is blurred. After this brief engagement with a case study, I offer an elongated introduction to the psychoanalytic theories through which Bishop's ideas of desire and neighbourly love emerged. This includes reference to both problematic and productive methods of using psychoanalytic theory as a tool to critically respond to performance and art. The chapter traces psychoanalytic theory from its position as a tool for identifying and analysing an individual's desires to approaching desire as an inherently inter-relational phenomenon that can only be analysed from within the social system through which it emerges. Here I suggest that Bishop's position inherently relies on the former of these approaches.

Chapter 3 reflects on a short collaboration between my own performance art duo, AuntyNazi, and art group a.a.s. a.a.s' practice is important in this thesis because of their commitment to the contingencies of participatory performance. All the incidents, actions and affects that arise through the social interactions that a.a.s facilitate can become integral parts of the projects and significantly impact upon how they develop. The awkwardness I

discuss emerged as a contingent result of the responses of the particular individuals involved in the project, which included myself. There was a clash of two awkward modes of being: AuntyNazi's dyspraxia and what I identify as a.a.s' Bartleby-like ethics. Bartleby is the titular character of a short story by Hermann Melville who relentlessly and disturbingly responds to all requests for productive action with the phrase 'I prefer not to'.⁴⁷ I align a.a.s' practice with Bartleby because of their own resistance to fixity, framing and goal-orientated activity. The contingent nature of the awkward outcomes of the project means that this chapter stands out as a test of my dyspraxic- C/PPaR methodology. This is because in this case my position as a collaborator had a role in the emergence of that awkwardness. My research was not based upon first-hand experience of an awkwardness that was already integral to the project. However, due to a.a.s' openness, awkwardness *became* integral to the project. Hence the chapter is important in terms of accounting for a practice that embraces awkwardness even if it does not pursue it.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the performance artist David Hoyle, framing participation as a form of complex affirmation and engaging with Hoyle's car-crash flips between ecstatically convivial and acerbically antagonistic tones. The awkwardness discussed in this chapter relates to the ethical responsibilities Hoyle confronts his audience with as he engages in potentially damaging acts. Those present are challenged to choose whether or not to affirm these acts. Further to this, my reading of Hoyle's own ethical position is supported by an engagement with Antigonian ethics. For example, I identify

⁴⁷ Hermann Melville, 'Bartleby the Scrivener' in *Billy Budd and Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1998) pp. 1-38.

moments in which Hoyle pursues activities despite audiences' disapproval, displaying a kind of Antigonian pursuit of desire that resists the lure of communal approval. Following the reading of Antigone offered above, Hoyle's ruthless defiance is not read as reducible to a pursuit of personal desire, but instead emerges as a response to a complex and contradictory set of causes.

In Chapter 5 I write about my experiences of collaborating with Reactor on several of their multi-layered, large-scale, fantastical worlds of role-play and interactive games. Reactor's practice is framed as an immersion in, and foregrounding of the complexities of neighbourly love, as opposed to a pursuit of individual desire or a facilitation of cosy socialising that disavows awkwardness.

My conclusion reflects on the way that each of the participatory performance I have engaged with facilitate the simultaneous act of being involved, and critiquing that which we are involved in. This entails a return to the points made in this introduction about the efficacy of awkwardness in relation to analysis and critique. It also includes clarifications of the contributions this thesis makes to the discourses around the social turn in art and performance, revisiting the blind spots that the thesis identifies. I finish with the proposal that accounts and critiques of awkward participatory performance should also embrace awkwardness. This entails a return to the comments made in the

preface to this thesis about the potential efficacy of dyspraxic text in relation to Peggy Phelan's description of performative writing.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 149.

Chapter 1

The Social Turn

This chapter outlines and responds to one of the two major theoretical contexts for my thesis, namely, writing that addresses the 'social turn' in art and performance. The other is Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic politics, which I put to work throughout the rest of the thesis. Here I outline key texts that define and debate the social turn in art and performance and describe the ways in which my research and writing supplements and responds to them. Thus, my focus is on the writers that address, contribute to, and, I propose, construct this social turn. The three key theorists of the social turn are Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, and Shannon Jackson. Bishop uses the term 'social turn' in 2006 as part of a critique of the socio-political and aesthetic qualities of recent arts practices that frame and foreground social interactivity and of the writings that gather together and celebrate these practices.¹ This critique arose primarily as a response to Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (first published in French in 1998 and translated into English in 2002) in which he collects together 'a set of artistic practices, which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space'.² Bishop usefully, and disparagingly, summarises the characteristics of relational aesthetics as 'low

¹ Claire Bishop, The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents, *ArtForum*, (February 2006) <<http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=10274>> [accessed 1 February 2009].

² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), p. 113.

impact in appearance' and 'basically installation art in format', but with an essential insistence on 'use rather than contemplation'.³ The key texts of the 'social turn' in visual studies and performance studies include: Grant Kester's book *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (2004); articles by Bishop (2004, 2006), as well as her books *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005) and *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012); several articles by Jackson as well as her book *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (2006, 2008, 2011); and most recently, Jen Harvie's book *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013).⁴ This list is by no means exhaustive, and there are several other texts that discuss social engagement, participation, and collaboration in contemporary art and performance, including Lars Bang Larsen's essay 'Social Aesthetics: 11 examples to begin with, in the light of parallel history' (1999); Hal Foster's article 'Arty Party' (2003); Miwon Kwon's book *One Place After Another: Site-Specific and Locational Identity* (2004); artist Liam Gillick's written response to Bishop's critique of his and other's

³ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (Autumn 2004), 51-79 (55).

⁴ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'; Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *ArtForum*, (February 2006) <<http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=10274>> [accessed 1 February 2009]; Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012); Shannon Jackson, 'Social Practice', in 'P-S', *Performance Research*, 11:3, (2006) 87-126; Shannon Jackson, 'What is the "Social" in Social Practice?: comparing experiments in performance' in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 136-150; Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing art, supporting publics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011); Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

work (2006) and Gareth Whites' *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (2013).⁵

The first part of this chapter aims to address the exclusions of the social turn in art and performance. This means collecting together moments in which the writings that theorise this turn identify the exclusions and disavowals of certain participatory artworks. This sets the groundwork for my approach to exclusions, which focuses on the methodologies of producing and facilitating participatory art and performance that are seemingly left out in the existing critical writing on the social turn in art and performance. This focus on the exclusions of the social turn in art and performance begins in the second part of this chapter, which focuses on challenging the way that these theorisations frame participatory performance as either 'open' to the inherent contingencies of participation, or 'closed' - maintaining the authority of the artist(s). In the conclusion to this chapter I link my focus on these exclusions to my experiences as a dyspraxic person who is invested in producing, performing, and participating in contemporary participatory performance.

The main artists, performances and artworks discussed in this chapter are Rirkrit Tiravanija, Wochenklausur, Santiago Sierra, and Bjørn Venø. Of these

⁵ Lars Bang Larsen, 'Social Aesthetics: 11 examples to begin with, in the light of parallel history' in *Afterall*, no. 1 (London: Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design, 1990) 77-87; Hal Foster, 'Arty Party' in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 23, (4 Dec. 2003); Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004) Liam Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 115 (Winter 2006), 95–107; Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

four I have only experienced Bjørn Venø's work first hand. I was a participant in his performance *Inside Out* when it was presented at Martin O' Brien's and Franko B's Discharge vs. Untouchable event at the Flying Dutchman, London (22 June 2014). I have not had first hand experience of the participatory and relational artworks by Tiravanija, WochenKlausur, or Sierra. These are approached through the lens of those who have already described and analysed them. This means there is a heavy leaning towards secondary resources in this chapter. This may seem contradictory in a thesis that emphasises the importance of participation-as-research when critically engaging with participatory art and performance. However, there are two essential rationales for my approach in this chapter. The first is that the focus of this chapter is on the ways in which participatory art and performance is accounted within the framework of the social turn in art and performance. This is in order to clarify, supplement, and dispute these analyses, the positions on social engagement and efficacy that they support, and the approaches to participatory art and performance that they exclude. Having accounted for these approaches, I can then refocus and challenge them through my own critical accounts of participatory performances that I *have* participated in. The second rationale for approaching the work of Tiravanija, WochenKlausur, and Sierra through secondary sources is because the writers of these sources rarely evidence their own participation in the performances and artworks they write about. Focussing on, and re-performing their own impersonal approach and reliance on other's accounts of participation allows me to clearly distinguish that approach from the collaborator/performer-participation-as-research methodology that I engage with for the rest of the thesis.

Working chronologically, the writing below first addresses *Relational Aesthetics*. Using Bourriaud's book as a point of departure, I then provide outlines of Kester's, Bishop's, Jackson's and Harvie's approaches and arguments. As well as providing general introductions to Kester's, Jackson's and Harvie's arguments, I focus on their (and Bishop's) responses to some of the claims Bourriaud makes for relational art, particular as it is manifested in the relational installations of Tiravanija. Tiravanija is an artist who currently lives and works across New York, Berlin and Bangkok, and creates 'wall drawings, sculptures, installations, and text-based works that often relate to his social initiative'.⁶ His installations are, arguably, the most concrete, and frequently referenced example of relational art. He is well known on the international art scene for relational installations such as *Untitled (Free)* (1992) at 303 Gallery in New York, which involved him cooking and serving Thai rice and curry to gallery visitors.⁷ The serving of food and gathering of people together to eat it is a repeated gesture throughout Tiravanija's practice. As Bishop suggests, this practice (alongside Liam Gillick's) is the 'clearest expression of Bourriaud's argument that relational art privileges intersubjective relations over detached opticality'.⁸ Otherwise put, it is an art practice, like most of the projects collected together by Bourriaud, in which active, inter-relational involvement is repeatedly and insistently prioritised over visual spectacle and individualised critical distance. The neatness of the

⁶ 'FOCUS: Rirkrit Tiravanija', *The Modern* <
<http://www.themodern.org/exhibition/upcoming/focus-rirkrit-tiravanija/2177>>,
[accessed 8 August 2014].

⁷ Jackson 'Social Practice', 114.

⁸ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 61.

relationship of Tirivaniija's practice to the social turn is evident in the recurrence of (often derivative) references to his work across the writings that theorise it. I refer to these responses throughout the following literature review, as they encapsulate and introduce some of the key responses to and debates around the ethical problems and social and political efficacies of relational aesthetics in relation to the social turn in art and performance.

Relational Aesthetics

Relational Aesthetics brings together artworks that invite aesthetic judgment 'on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt'.⁹ Relationships between artworks and visitors, artists and visitors, and visitors and visitors are framed, by Nicolas Bourriaud, as the primary focus and material of many art practices in the 1990s. Artworks defined as 'relational' by Bourriaud include Jens Hanning's publically sited installation *Turkish Jokes* (1994), in which funny stories were broadcast in Turkish in a Copenhagen square,¹⁰ Alix Lambert's *Wedding Piece* (1992) in which she married and divorced four different people within the space of six months,¹¹ and Félix González-Torres' *Untitled (Blue Mirror)* (1990), consisting of a stack of sky-blue squares of paper that visitors were allowed to remove from the gallery.¹²

⁹ Bourriaud, p. 112.

¹⁰ Bourriaud, p. 17.

¹¹ Bourriaud, p. 34.

¹² Bourriaud, p. 49.

Bourriaud's Approach to the Relational Artworks of Rirkrit Tiravanija

For Bourriaud, relational installations such as Tiravanija's have the potential to form 'hands on utopias': intersubjective experiences that counter the contemporary commodification of socialisation in which the subject is 'reduced to the condition of a consumer of time and space'.¹³ This implies that when we get together with others to eat Tiravanija's curry we are able to step outside of our position as consumers who must invest, for example, in coffee or beer, or be on the receiving end of relentless advertising in order to socially interact with one another. The reference to 'utopias' suggests that these are ideal, or idealised, modes of local sociality. In Bourriaud's words, in these installations we have the opportunity to become more than just a member of a 'society of extras, where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication'.¹⁴ Tiravanija's apparent 'countering' of the commoditised, 'illusory' interactions offered in contemporary society exemplifies Bourriaud's claim that art 'today' (1998 for Bourriaud) is (or should be) occupied with 'modelling possible universes'.¹⁵ This, for Bourriaud, is a progression from the previous aim of art, which was to 'prepare and announce a future world'.¹⁶ In his words, the 'role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real'.¹⁷ Thus, for Bourriaud, Tiravanija's relational installations offer a kind of escape from the

¹³ Bourriaud, p. 9.

¹⁴ Bourriaud, p. 26.

¹⁵ Bourriaud, p. 13.

¹⁶ Bourriaud, p. 13.

¹⁷ Bourriaud, p. 13.

consumption-orientated 'society of extras', not so that we can change it, but so that we might work on better ways of living together within it.

Conversation Pieces

Grant Kester collects together projects that 'share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange'.¹⁸ As in many of Bourriaud's relational artworks these exchanges do not occur in response to a finished art object, but are, instead 'an integral part' of the artwork itself.¹⁹ Also like Bourriaud, Kester implies that these practices have the potential to act as spatial and temporal retreats from a contemporary social system of relentless consumerism and banal and empty transactions. Referring to these compromised social systems, and complaining about the collapsed differentiation between the aesthetics and style of much contemporary art and that of advertising, Kester describes how we are 'reduced to an atomized pseudocommunity of consumers, our sensibilities dulled by spectacle and repetition'.²⁰ Kester seeks out practices that resist this atomization and strive for the formulation of genuine communality. His definition of dialogical practices has a tighter focus than Bourriaud's relational practices. They do not just entail the pursuit of unsullied interactions between individuals, but also specifically focus on 'dialogical' interaction, hence the titular reference to 'conversation pieces'.²¹ These practices have the potential to reframe conversation 'as an active, generative process that can help us speak and

¹⁸ Kester, p. 8.

¹⁹ Kester, p. 8.

²⁰ Kester p. 29.

²¹ Kester p.10.

imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict'.²² They focus explicitly on the facilitation of the co-presence and exchange of a diversity of socio-political positions. In developing this definition Kester follows Mikhail Bakhtin, who 'argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation – a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view'.²³ Again, these are not conversations that emerge in response to a work of art 'as a locus of differing meanings'. Instead, the bringing together of differing interpretations of, and ameliorative responses to, concrete, and often localised, socio-political problems is the substance of the artwork itself. Hence, the key socio-political efficacy of Kester's *Conversation Pieces* does not only lie in the creation of spaces and contexts in which we can try out idealised modes of socialising (as in Bourriaud's 'relational' artworks). More than this, it is important that the facilitated dialogue has the potential to lead to concrete change in the problematically individualist, consumerist, and socially imbalanced systems that they attempt to bracket out.

For Kester, the Austrian group WochenKlausur provide an exemplary case of this productive, concrete socio-political intervention and amelioration through the facilitation of dialogue. For example, Kester describes WochenKlausur's socially engaged project *Intervention to Aid Drug Addicted Women* (1994), which occurred in Zurich. This project aimed to intervene in the 'uniquely precarious situation' of drug-addicted women who were supporting

²² Kester p. 8.

²³ Kester p. 10.

themselves through prostitution.²⁴ In order to address this situation, Wochenklausur cannily bought together 'secretaries of the major Swiss political parties, the police commissioner, four of the eight city councillors, several corporate managers, and the chief editors of the city's major newspapers as well as sex workers and activists'.²⁵ The outcome of this gathering was monetary support for a '*pension* housing fifteen women'.²⁶ As well as this direct approach to social change, WochenKlausur's works, and the other practices Kester describes, also differ from Bourriaud's in that they almost always take place outside of the gallery system and often away from any context that might clearly position the works as 'art'. In turn they directly challenge the presumptions, restrictions, and exclusions of the contexts and locations that they do inhabit.

Kester's Approach to the Relational Artworks of Rirkrit Tiravanija

Kester describes Bourriaud's response to Tiravanija's relational art as a celebration of the potential of relational art works to 'transcend institutional and cultural boundaries' and create 'a utopian space of free and open exchange'.²⁷ His sceptical response is to note that Tiravanija is 'a highly successful and sought after artist who works and teaches in New York, the very epicenter of Western cultural privilege'.²⁸ The problematic relationship of

²⁴ WochenKlausur, 'Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women' http://wochenklausur.at/projekte/02p_lang_en.htm [accessed 29th May 2014].

²⁵ Kester p. 100.

²⁶ Kester p. 100.

²⁷ Kester, p. 105.

²⁸ Kester, p. 104.

this 'privilege' and 'success' to Bourriaud's ideals is, for Kester, evidenced in the controversy that surrounded Tiravanija's installation *Untitled 1996* (*Tomorrow is another Day*) at Cologne's Kölnischer Kunstverein (1996). The installation consisted of a reconstruction of Tiravanija's New York apartment, offered, according to Kester as an "'open space" for cooking, eating, and "communal celebration".²⁹ At the same time as Tiravanija was reconstructing his apartment, the Cologne police were removing a nearby homeless settlement. This was because of 'a local business group called City Marketing that was concerned about the threat the homeless would pose to tourism and gentrification in the area'.³⁰ Kester goes on to refer to the 'number of local artists and activists' who 'found the juxtaposition of Tiravanija's magnanimous spatial gesture (albeit one in which admission was carefully monitored by a stern Hausmeister) and the brutality of (business motivated) police attacks on the homeless deeply problematic'.³¹ In response to this 'deeply problematic' juxtaposition, Kester opines that whilst Tiravanija 'cannot be blamed for the attacks on the homeless community near the gallery' his projects do 'suggest the challenges facing artists who claim a dedication to dialogue but ignore the (political, social, and cultural) context in which that dialogue is situated'.³² Thus Kester alludes to an unsavoury irony in Tiravanija's practice in which a localised embrace of sharing is supported by, and potentially supports, ideologies of privileged accessibility and brutal exclusion.

²⁹ Kester, p. 105.

³⁰ Kester, p. 105.

³¹ Kester, p. 105.

³² Kester, p. 105.

Claire Bishop

Bishop's contribution to the theorisation of the social turn in art and performance can be broken down into three strands. Firstly, there is the problematic delegation of social work away from the government and onto the artist. Bishop states that, in the UK:

New Labour have for the last nine years instrumentalised art to fulfill policies of social inclusion – a cost-effective way of justifying public spending on the arts while diverting attention away from the structural causes of decreased social participation, which are political and economic (welfare, transport, education, healthcare, etc).³³

This leads her to suggest that, given the choice, she would prefer for art to be instrumentalised by the art market as opposed to the state. Secondly, Bishop accuses writers such as Kester of privileging social work over aesthetics, suggesting that in these approaches 'there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond'.³⁴ Thirdly, Bishop is skeptical about the politics of work that has a 'feel-good', 'love-thy-neighbour' attitude towards community building, social relations and relationality.³⁵

Bishop's politics here are openly indebted to the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their move towards 'radical democracy', in which any stabilization or resolution is problematically entwined with the quilting effect of

³³ Claire Bishop in Jennifer Roche, 'Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop', *Community Arts Network*, July 2006, http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/07/socially_engage.php (accessed 02/02/2009).

³⁴ Bishop 'The Social Turn', 1.

³⁵ Bishop, in Roche

one decision being made 'at the detriment of another one'.³⁶ Thus for Bishop, 'a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased'.³⁷ It is perhaps due to the final of these three positions that Bishop favours socially engaged projects that she describes as 'relational antagonism'.³⁸ However, an antagonistic approach to social engagement might also signal an active resistance to the instrumentalisation of art for social good. Bishop attributes the term 'relational antagonism' to artists such as Santiago Sierra, who, like WochenKlausur, has a concretely descriptive approach to titling, as demonstrated in the piece *10 Inch Line Shaved on the heads of two Junkies who received a shot of Heroin* which occurred in San Juan de Puerto Rico in the year 2000.³⁹

Claire Bishop's Approach to the Relational Artworks of Rirkrit Tiravanija

Bishop also discusses *Untitled 1996 (Tomorrow is another Day)*, providing an analysis that aligns with Kester's:

The *Kölnischer Stadt-Anzeiger* [a Cologne newspaper] concurred that the work offered "a kind of 'asylum' for everyone." But who is the "everyone" here? This may be a microtopia, but—like utopia—it is still predicated on the exclusion of those who hinder or prevent its realization. (It is tempting to consider what might have happened if Tiravanija's space had been invaded by those seeking genuine

³⁶ Chantal Mouffe, 'Deconstruction, Pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy', in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge 1996), 1-12 (9).

³⁷ Bishop 'Antagonism', 55-56

³⁸ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art*, 120-127.

³⁹ See Santiago Sierra, http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200011_1024.php [accessed 05/05/2011].

“asylum.”)⁴⁰

Bishop's has an on-going interest in relational artworks that facilitate and manipulate the kinds of 'invasions' that she implies Tiravanija's installation denied. However, in the practices she admires, it is more likely the artists and their audiences that are invading. For example, Bishop returns to Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002) throughout her responses to relational aesthetics and the social turn.⁴¹ *Bataille Monument* was an installation situated in Kassel, Germany as part of the Documenta 11 exhibition. Bishop describes the work as being comprised of 'three installations in large makeshift shacks, a bar run by a local family, and a sculpture of a tree, all erected on a lawn surrounded by two housing projects'.⁴² It was realised through collaboration with paid members of the mainly Turkish community that inhabited its site. Visitors had to travel some distance from the main sites of 'Documenta 11', via a local Turkish taxi company, in order to reach Hirschhorn's installations. They were then 'stranded at the *Monument* until a return cab became available'.⁴³ The relevance of this piece in relation to relational artwork's (negation of) invasions, or 'intrusions' is summarised in Bishop's analysis:

In locating the *Monument* in the middle of a community whose ethnic and economic status did not mark it as a target audience for *Documenta*, Hirschhorn contrived a curious rapprochement between the influx of art tourists and the area's residents. Rather than make the local populace subject to what he calls the "zoo effect," Hirschhorn's

⁴⁰ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 68.

⁴¹ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 75-77; *Installation Art*, pp. 123-127; 'The Social Turn', 181; *Artificial Hells*, pp. 21-23.

⁴² Bishop, 'Antagonism', 75.

⁴³ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 75.

project made visitors feel like hapless intruders.⁴⁴

A major reason for Bishop's interest in the potential for relational practices to facilitate invasions and intrusions is her investment in the socio-political efficacy of the antagonisms that might arise from them, again indebted to Mouffe and Laclau's approach to democracy, as mentioned above. This leads to the assertion that relational installations such as Tiravanija's, and the utopic political systems that they respond to, attempt a problematic sidestepping of antagonism by barring intrusions from those prejudicially framed as potential antagonists and focusing on the facilitation and maintenance of conviviality. The risk here is that without antagonism 'there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order—a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy'.⁴⁵ Thus, for Bishop, the socio-political problems of Tiravanija's work are not only present through its limited accessibility, but also in the implicit suppression and authority experienced by those who *are* able to access them.

In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop returns to the recurring problem of Tiravanija's exclusivities in a brief discussion of another cooking-utensil based relational installation called *untitled 1993 (flädlesuppe)*. The installation, which was exhibited as part of the 'Backstage' exhibition at the Hamburger Kunstverein (1993), was only operational before the exhibition opened and therefore not usable by the public. Responding to this installation, Bishop summarises both her and Kester's critique of the claims made for Tiravanija's practice:

⁴⁴ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 75-76.

⁴⁵ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 66.

One of the paradoxes of Tiravanija's practice is that in intensifying convivial relations for a small group of people (in this case, the exhibiting artists), it produces greater exclusivity vis-à-vis the general public.⁴⁶

In responding to these observations, I am interested in what Tiravanija would have to do in order to frame these 'exclusivities' and misguided 'intensifying' of conviviality as an integral part of the work's politics. Jackson alludes to the trigger-happy way in which Bishop fires off diagnoses of a work's convivial or antagonistic approach to interactivity and participation, noting that 'certain artists – such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick – end up on the “bad” feel-good side of [Bishop's] critical equation while others – such as Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn – end up on her “good” antagonistic side'.⁴⁷ She then goes on to point out that 'sometimes Bishop doesn't like art that is feeling good, and sometimes she doesn't like art that is doing good'.⁴⁸ It is clear that despite its lack of explicit 'bad-feelings', Bishop does identify a murky undergrowth of antagonism beneath what she dismisses as Tiravanija's 'cozy situations'.⁴⁹ This underlying antagonism lies in the project's exclusions and the potential resentment that this exclusivity breeds. Could this playing out of the reliance of cozy community building on uncomfortable antagonisms be framed as the key political message of the work? In other words, is it not possible to frame the uneasy complicity between 'good-feeling' and 'bad-doing' as the experience Tiravanija is offering up for our interaction and critical reflection? This would position the work alongside, as opposed to

⁴⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 209.

⁴⁷ Jackson, 'Social Practice', 115.

⁴⁸ Jackson, 'Social Practice', 115.

⁴⁹ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 79.

in opposition to, Bishop's antagonistic artists (such as Santiago Sierra). I return to Bishop's reductive and simplifying approach to conviviality and antagonism in my writing on performance artist David Hoyle (Chapter 4).

Before moving on to a discussion of Jackson's work on the social turn and her responses to Tiravanija's practice, it is important to note that Bourriaud's discussion of conviviality is more nuanced and complex than Bishop's dismissals suggest. Apparently pre-empting critiques such as Bishop's, he addresses those who might frame a Tiravanija installation as 'nothing more than a phonily utopian pantomime'.⁵⁰ For Bourriaud, this is not because, as my position states (influenced by Jackson's), a relational work's conviviality or antagonism is often contingent on who the participants, secondary viewers or critics are, and how they participate, look and criticise. It is, instead, because such responses are 'mistaking the object of the practice'.⁵¹ This is because, in Bourriaud's words, 'the purpose is not conviviality, but the *product of* this conviviality, otherwise put, a complex form that combines a formal structure, objects made available to visitors, and the fleeting image issuing from collective behaviour'.⁵² Bourriaud states that what 'these critics overlook is that the content of artistic proposals has to be judged in a formal way: in relation to art history, and bearing in mind the political value of forms'.⁵³ He is suggesting that we frame conviviality as a 'formal' aspect of relational artworks, and that form itself is inherently political. For Bourriaud, the word 'form' in this context relates to a 'bringing together' of 'heterogeneous units' on a level, in order to

⁵⁰ Bourriaud, p. 82.

⁵¹ Bourriaud, p. 83.

⁵² Bourriaud, p. 83.

⁵³ Bourriaud, p. 82.

create a relationship to the world'.⁵⁴ In line with this definition, he suggests that for artists who engage with conviviality as a formal quality, it 'is not a matter of representing angelic worlds, but of producing the conditions thereof'.⁵⁵ It is clear that for Bishop, the conditions needed to create 'angelic worlds' would be unlikely to include overt conviviality. However, she does not seem to hear Bourriaud's call to frame conviviality as a complex *formal* component of these projects as well as to focus on the menagerie of other formal attributes that produce, and are produced by conviviality. Whilst there is an implied reference to these ideas in her suggestion that for 'Bourriaud, the structure is the subject matter—and in this he is far more formalist than he acknowledges',⁵⁶ her focus on the misguided political ideology of relentless pursuits of conviviality suggests that she does not take on board the complexity of the role of conviviality in the aesthetics and politics of *Relational Aesthetics*. This seems particularly neglectful considering her pursuit of artworks and critical responses that 'attempt to think the aesthetic and the social/political together'.⁵⁷

Shannon Jackson

In her essay 'What is the "social" in social practice?' Jackson compares 'one artist [Santiago Sierra] who calls himself a "Minimalist with a guilt complex" with another [Shannon Flattery, founder of 'Touchable Stories'] who seeks to

⁵⁴ Bourriaud, p. 111.

⁵⁵ Bourriaud, p. 83.

⁵⁶ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 64.

⁵⁷ Bishop, 'The Social Turn'.

give marginal sectors of society the opportunity to “define their own voice”.⁵⁸ Sierra’s controversial installations, celebrated by Bishop for their explicit social antagonisms,⁵⁹ include *Eight People Paid to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (Guatemala, 1999) and *250cm Line Tattooed on Six Paid People* (Havana, 1999). They enact problematic modes of labour, delegation, exploitation, and economic precarity, through minimalist performance installations. Flattery’s ‘Touchable Stories’ are described by Jackson as ‘a Boston-based community arts group that creates multiyear, interactive, site-specific oral history installations in neighbourhood community spaces’.⁶⁰ Jackson exposes and examines the surprising overlaps in the way both these seemingly opposing practices work with and against duration, instrumentalisation, didacticism, and intelligibility. Through this, she demonstrates the contingencies, prejudices, and ideologies that underlie and support the attribution of the term ‘social’ to an art practice. This troubling of the terminologies, lexicons, and disciplines used to organise, celebrate, deride, or reduce art practices runs throughout Jackson’s work. It is a key influence in my own building of awkward bridges between terminologies and practices (i.e. the social turn and Hoyle’s raucous, ‘avant garde’ cabaret) and between one practice and another (i.e. Hoyle’s solo club performances and Reactor’s publically sited, collaboratively developed events and experiences).

⁵⁸ Jackson, ‘What is the “Social” in Social Practice?’, p. 144.

⁵⁹ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 78-79; *Installation Art*, pp. 120-122.

⁶⁰ Jackson, ‘What is the “Social” in Social Practice?’, p. 144.

In her book *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, Jackson neatly summarise her theory of the 'contingency of perception', which runs throughout her work and influences my own.⁶¹

Our evaluations of work depend not only upon critical histories but also upon disciplinary perceptual habits that can make for drastically different understandings of what we are in fact encountering. Perceptions of stasis and durationality, passivity and activity, stillness and action, might well be in the eye (and body) of the beholder.⁶²

In *Social Works* the focus of this contingent approach to perception is 'support'. In her first chapter, which is the one most relevant to this thesis, she works to undo the polarization of artistic autonomy and systems of care and dependence. She insists that whether 'cast in aesthetic or social terms, freedom and expression are not opposed to obligation and care, but in fact depend upon each other'.⁶³ The modes of support that Jackson addresses include those 'that sustain not only the life of art, but also the lives of artists'.⁶⁴ This leads to the 'contention that some socially engaged art can be distinguished from others by the degree to which they provoke reflection on the contingent systems that support the management of life'.⁶⁵ She insists that:

By emphasising – rather than being embarrassed by – the infrastructural operations of performance, we might find a different way to join aesthetic engagement to the social sphere, mapping a shared

⁶¹ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 4.

⁶² Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 4.

⁶³ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 29.

interest in the confounding of insides and outsides, selves and structures.⁶⁶

Following Jackson's position, my own interest is in the way the participatory performances I discuss occasionally attempt to set up their own, autonomous forms of co-dependence, support networks, and social spheres *within* the performance itself. The 'confounding of insides and outsides' thus emerges through the affirmative, negating, comfortable or awkward relationships that these internal networks of care and responsibility have with those that support the performances, or exist outside of them.

The text that stands out as a key point of origin for the theoretical research for this thesis, and seemingly Jackson's own contributions to the 'social turn', is her contribution to the 'Lexicon' issue of *Performance Research*. This issue consists of an A-Z of key terms and concepts that each contributor 'deemed to be making an impact on performance in its broadest sense, and would reflect aspects of the current state of ideas and practices in the field of contemporary performance research'.⁶⁷ Jackson contributes the term 'social practice', asking: 'What is social practice? How do we know when we are in the presence of it? What frameworks and methods are most appropriate for understanding what it is and what it does?'⁶⁸ A key thread in Jackson's writings on the social turn addresses the ways that others, particularly Bishop, generate and perpetuate limited and limiting answers to these questions. For Jackson many of the current, routine frameworks and methods used for

⁶⁶ Jackson, *Social Works*, p, 29.

⁶⁷ Ric Allsop and David Williams, 'Editorial', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 11:3, iii-v.

⁶⁸ Jackson, 'Social Practice', 114.

understanding what social practice is, and what it is for, reductively cast socially-engaged work as ‘overly pre-occupied with content over form and with accessibility over critical antagonism’.⁶⁹ This position is underlined by an on-going concern over ‘how often a critic’s reaction to social content has obscured his or her ability to credit a work with any kind of formal innovation’.⁷⁰ Jackson works to challenge this obscuration and reduction, exposing the affinity of its ‘critical barometers’ with anti-theatrical prejudice and, more problematically, with ‘previous critical movements that notoriously rationalized the subordination of feminist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic art’.⁷¹ The key elements of this ‘critical barometer’ are summarised in Jackson’s observation that the ‘aesthetic turn to the social is regularly cast and critiqued with the lexicons used to critique performance –feel-good, content-heavy, literal, accessible, consumable, unclear authorship, etc’.⁷² Jackson asks a series of essential questions in order to highlight the contingencies of these lexicons, and the trigger-happy ways in which they are fired out as a means to negatively diagnose an artwork’s capitulations to social amelioration as opposed to aesthetic and formal vanguardism. For example, she approaches Bishop’s critique of ‘unclear authorship’ by asking:

What if a radical openness to collaborative authorship is not so much a moral reification of ‘the Christian good soul’, but a formal experiment in whether ‘the Author’ is in fact ‘dead’?

⁶⁹ Jackson, ‘Social Practice’, 116.

⁷⁰ Jackson, ‘Social Practice’, 116.

⁷¹ Jackson, ‘Social Practice’, 116.

⁷² Jackson, ‘Social Practice’, 117.

Here Jackson is suggesting that the un-rooted, dissipated authorship of a collaborative project productively refuses a reductive interpretive approach based on ascertaining the intentions and desires of an individual author.

Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* is a particular effective text to use in a disagreement with a 'critic' such as Bishop, because of its claims of the inter-relationship between such expert criticism and authorship:

Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostasis: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic.⁷³

Jackson's use of Barthes' theory of authorship and criticism here implies that Bishop's preference for clear, individual authorship might emerge more from a concern for her own profession and cultural capital than the capitulation of artistic autonomy. My own approach to the question of authorship, which emerges from Jackson's argument here, focuses on the relationships and overlaps between participants and authors. I observe awkward instabilities around authorship and authority in each of the performances and projects I examine.

The next essential question in Jackson's troubling of Bishop's 'critical barometer' addresses her derision towards 'feel-good' art. For Jackson, Bishop equates Mouffe's '(post)-socialist theory of antagonism with the felt antagonism of a spectator's encounter with appropriately edgy art material'.⁷⁴

⁷³ Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 147).

⁷⁴ Jackson, 'Social Practice', 115.

Jackson refers to the WochenKlausur project mentioned in my discussion of Kester above. She asks:

When prostitutes and civic leaders talk on a boat about drugs, is such a social practice a capitulation to “consensus politics” if they try to understand each other? Is it insufficiently “antagonistic” if they find each other legible? Or is the oddity of that boat and its members itself a gesture that “antagonizes” the instrumental processes and habituated divisions of a social welfare operation?⁷⁵

This demonstrates what Jackson will later define as the ‘contingency of perception’ in defining or locating an artwork’s antagonism or conviviality.⁷⁶

My own approach to consensus, conviviality, and antagonism is strongly influenced by this suggestion that an artwork’s position as either ‘feel-good’ or ‘feel-bad’ depends on who is applying these definitions, and what agendas lie beneath this act of defining. However, in relation to these allusions towards the potential ‘contingencies of perception’ and reductiveness of categorizing relational and participatory art and performance based on conviviality or antagonism, it is important to outline another of Bishop’s key critiques of the claims made for Tiravanija’s practice. This is because her position here, which is based on skepticism towards artworks that overly embrace ‘openness’ in terms of their authorial status, functionality, and meaning, implies an equal skepticism towards critical responses, such as Jackson’s, that focus on the contingencies of categorizing, evaluating, and analyzing artworks.

⁷⁵ Jackson, ‘Social Practice’, 117.

⁷⁶ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 4.

Bishop notes that the social efficacy of relational artworks is often attributed to their position as a 'potential trigger for participation' and a 'desire to activate the viewer'.⁷⁷ In connection to this, for Bishop, there are three key writers whose theories on the role of authorship underlie what Bourriaud describes as a 'forever unfinished discursiveness'.⁷⁸ These are Walter Benjamin's 'Author as Producer' (1934), Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' (1968), and Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1962).⁷⁹ This implies, firstly, that the apparent openness of relational aesthetics emerges through what Bishop observes as an overly literal Barthesian undoing of authorial authority in collaborative and interactive installations.⁸⁰ This is due to their frequent incorporation and remixing of art works by others, and their inherent collaborative methodology. This means it is often difficult to 'identify who has made a particular piece of "relational" art', leading to a 'blurring' of the 'imprint of individual authorial status'.⁸¹ For Barthes, this 'blurring' of authorial status has the potential to break down some of the 'limits' that he suggests an author imposes, because to 'give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing'.⁸² In turn, the overtly interactive nature of relational works such as Tiravanija's might be said to follow Benjamin's call for art and literature to lead 'consumers to production'

⁷⁷ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 61-62.

⁷⁸ Bourriaud, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 62; Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", *New Left Review*, 1/62 (July-August 1970), < <http://newleftreview.org/l/62/walter-benjamin-the-author-as-producer>>, [accessed 09/10/2014]; Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148; Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁸⁰ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 55.

⁸¹ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 55.

⁸² Barthes, p. 147.

and be capable of ‘making co-workers out of readers or spectators’.⁸³

However, for Bishop, this approach to openness misunderstands these theoretical concepts of what Eco describes as an ‘Open Work’. As Bishop points out, for Eco, ‘every work of art is potentially “open” since it may produce an unlimited range of possible readings’.⁸⁴ Therefore the fact that Bourriaud only applies these post-authorial concepts of openness to relational practices, such as Tiravanija’s, overly literalizes this concept ‘and thereby redirects the argument back to artistic intentionality rather than issues of reception’.⁸⁵ In other words, despite a declared fidelity to the concept of the ‘death of the author’, the focus is still on the *intention* of the artist to be ‘open’. This is evident in the artwork’s social structures, the modes and sensibilities of the interactivity, and the ways in which participation is triggered or invited. In her footnotes Bishop goes further, suggesting that this ‘approach actually forecloses “open-ended” readings, since the meaning of the work becomes so synonymous with the fact that its meaning is open’.⁸⁶ Following Bishop, I am interested in the potentials of works that have a complex relationship with this open/closed polarity. I return to this in my writing on Bjørn Venø’s *Outside In* at the end of this chapter.

⁸³ Benjamin, 6.

⁸⁴ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 62.

⁸⁵ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 62.

⁸⁶ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 62, n. 30.

Jackson's Approach to the Relational Artworks of Rirkrit Tiravanija

In discussing Jackson's approach to Tiravanija's practice and relational aesthetics, I would like to reiterate Bourriaud's insistence on this relation of conviviality to a relational installation's *formal* qualities, on its position as a formal attribute itself, and on the formal outcomes that conviviality produces. This is an important distinction because it frames 'good-feeling' as a *material* of the work, not merely as an aim or serendipitous outcome. Jackson acknowledges this when she observes that relational artworks such as Tiravanija's regularly play with the convention of changing 'visual art understandings of what constitutes the "material" of the art object'.⁸⁷ She exemplifies this by noting that Tiravanija's 'didactics' include 'reference to materials, but instead of writing "oil on canvas" or "wire on steel" he writes that his materials are "lots of people"'.⁸⁸ It follows that if an artwork's visitors can be framed as a primary material *of* that artwork, then presumably the affective qualities of their interactions can as well. This is the important point that Bourriaud suggests that critics such as Bishop ignore. It is an essential point for me, because part of the methodology of this thesis includes framing the awkwardness of social interactions as a material (i.e. a key component of what Bourriaud describes as an artwork's 'structural unity') of the performances and artworks in which it occurs,⁸⁹ as opposed to an incidental, unwelcome consequence. The exception to this is a.a.s' Xe54 project, in which, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, awkwardness was incidental. However,

⁸⁷ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 34.

⁸⁹ Bourriaud, p. 111.

I argue that it was not unwelcome once it was produced and therefore that it *became* a material of the project.

Jackson's reference to Tiravanija's framing of 'lots of people' as his artwork's 'material' leads into a focus on the word 'substrate' in Bourriaud's description of relational aesthetics as an 'art form where the substrate is formed by intersubjectivity'.⁹⁰ Jackson notes that this use of the word 'substrate' places relational art in 'an ongoing conversation on the nature of "support"'.⁹¹ She links Bourriaud's use of the word to an undoing of 'the conventions of the nineteenth-century idealist aesthetic', which 'argued that art achieved its greatness to the degree that its representations transcended its material substrate, rising above its raw material and its social apparatus of production'.⁹² If early-mid 20th Century art foregrounded its reliance on, for example, paint, canvases, and gallery walls, mid-late 20th Century art foregrounded its reliance on people. This developing relationship to 'raw materials' is important to Jackson, because of her interest, throughout *Social Works*, in 'the tendency, or not' for artists and critics 'to engage in the "avowal of support"'.⁹³ Tiravanija's foregrounding of 'lots of people' as a primary material of his installations suggests that he is invested in the 'avowal' of the fact that art practices are supported by networks of interacting humans. However, Jackson questions 'whether such relational activity can be interpreted as a revelation of interdependent support, even if the support has moved from the static undermounted place of the base to the lateralized

⁹⁰ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 34; Bourriaud, p. 15.

⁹¹ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 34.

⁹² Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 31.

⁹³ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 31.

dynamic of the living infrastructure'.⁹⁴ This questioning links to Jackson's snide, but evocative description of Tiravanija as an 'international art darling', thus hinting at a reinforcement of the concerns around Tiravanija's elite cultural status put forward by Kester and Bishop. As a counterpoint in this discussion of the relation between an interactive artwork and its supports and substrates, Jackson refers to the socially-engaged interventions of Mierle Laderman Ukeles.⁹⁵ She does this in order to 'demonstrate earlier feminist and class-conscious innovations that preceded the conceptual gestures of "relational aesthetics"'.⁹⁶ Ukeles' projects include *Touch Sanitation* (1977-1980), 'in which she shook the hands of thousands of sanitation workers' and *The Social Mirror* (1983), a 'reflective garbage truck'.⁹⁷ For Jackson, this focus on 'the unrecognized labour of domesticity and sanitation' demonstrates 'how the so-called inter-subjective substrates of relational art simultaneously interact with systemic substrates of material support'.⁹⁸ Following this, Jackson's argument in response to Tiravanija's practice and the claims Bourriaud makes for it can be summarised as another observation of its paradoxical exclusions. Whilst his installations facilitate and foreground a horizontal network of interacting individuals, it does not address the vertical structures of power that these interactions rely on. In other words, it excludes the 'substrate' of gallery cleaners, invigilators, ticket sellers, and so on, from the lateral interactions that he triggers and facilitates.

⁹⁴ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 34.

⁹⁵ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 77.

⁹⁶ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 77.

⁹⁷ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 76.

⁹⁸ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 77.

Jen Harvie

Jen Harvie's book *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* focuses on what she describes as "aesthetically turned" socially turned' art and performance, specifically in London, UK.⁹⁹ It has less of a direct relationship to my research than Bourriaud's, Jackson's, and Bishop's writings, and so I only offer a brief outline here. This is because its focus is less on the internal ethics and politics of participatory performances and more on the external material conditions and social structures that surround and support them. The main argument of Harvie's book outlines the potential for these relational and participatory art and performance practices to be directly (rather than only ideologically) complicit in the perpetuation of neoliberal capitalist ideology and activity. For example, she examines ways in which artists are encouraged to position themselves as entrepreneurial, emerging as 'artpreneurs' who 'work privately for her own advantage'.¹⁰⁰ Harvie critiques artworks and performances that are socially engaged due to their temporary locational positioning in disused spaces (known as 'pop-ups') in often culturally and economically deprived areas. They are critiqued for their placement in leveraging the 'gentrification that displaces underprivileged Londoners'.¹⁰¹ When Harvie does address the modes of participation internal to art and performance projects she does so in reference to contemporary models of labour and consumerism. On the one hand, she focuses on projects in which

⁹⁹ Harvie, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Harvie, p.63.

¹⁰¹ Harvie, p.113.

participants find themselves enacting tasks that naturalise the problematic predominance of unpaid and precarious labour, writing that:

Thus, like [Richard] Sennett's worker in the institutions of the new capitalism, the audience member in emerging participatory and art 'abandon[s] past experience' and relinquishes the opportunity to 'take pride in being good at something specific' (Sennett, 2006, p.5). The audience member as worker in this flexible art and performance economy is rendered, in many ways, insecure, deskilled and alienated.¹⁰²

On the other hand this frames some modes of interactive theatre (such as that by the London based theatre company *Punch Drunk*) as reflective of the hollow consumerist agendas of the experience economy.¹⁰³ Playing fairly herself throughout, Harvie also points out the potentials for increased agency, empowerment and democracy to be promoted and exercised in participatory and immersive contemporary art and performance.

Harvie's Approach to the Relational Artworks of Rirkrit Tiravanija

Harvie's response to Tiravanija's practice is brief but, again, has an essential relationship to my research methodology. Harvie questions the implied uniqueness of relational aesthetics in relation to the claims of socio-political efficacy that Bourriaud makes for it, suggesting that 'even artworks which do not engage audiences in a familiar social setting such as a mealtime, also

¹⁰² Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 47.

¹⁰³ Harvie, p. 178-179.

often engage them socially'.¹⁰⁴ Harvie refers to the various 'large-scale installations' that have been produced in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall.¹⁰⁵ For example, the 'otherworldly environment of Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003)' could, she suggests, be 'considered relational' because the 'immersion of audiences in a shared environment requires those audiences to experience the artwork in relation not only to "itself" but also to each other'.¹⁰⁶

The widening of the criteria for what might be considered 'relational' and 'socially engaged' is a key aim of this thesis. Picking up on Harvie's response to Tiravanija's work, I would argue that social interaction not only occurs without an artwork existing explicitly as a social setting, but, following Bishop, that artworks with an overt attention on being together with others risk diluting and intervening in our relationship with those others.¹⁰⁷ This is primarily because it shifts our focus away from those with whom we are interacting, why we are interacting with them, and what the outcomes of that interaction might be, and onto the mere fact that we *are* interacting with them. In my arguments, awkwardness emerges as a disruptive element in this dilution. Without it, social interaction becomes synonymous with the food in Bishop's observation that '*what* Tiravanija cooks, *how* and *for whom*, are less important to Bourriaud than the fact that he gives away the results of his cooking for free'.¹⁰⁸ As Bishop points out, to his credit, Bourriaud has acknowledged this as a potential problem:

¹⁰⁴ Harvie, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Harvie, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Harvie, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 67-68.

¹⁰⁸ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 64.

Bourriaud recognizes this problem—but he does not raise it in relation to the artists he promotes: ‘Connecting people, creating interactive communicative experience,’ he says, ‘What for? If you forget the ‘what for?’ I’m afraid you’re left with simple Nokia art—producing interpersonal relations for their own sake and never addressing their political aspects.’¹⁰⁹

However, for Bishop, Bourriaud’s recognition of this problem is let down by his focus on Tiravanija, whose projects fall ‘short of addressing the political aspect of communication’.¹¹⁰ One reason Bishop gives for these short-fallings is the failure to examine *who* these works are for, as discussed above in reference to *Untitled 1996 (Tomorrow is another Day)* and the plight of the homeless individuals being evicted nearby. Following this critique, it could also be argued that relational artworks risk performing, and potentially perpetuating, what Jodi Dean describes as ‘Communicative Capitalism’.¹¹¹ This concept refers to the problematic shift from communication as a message, to communication as mere ‘contribution’:

The message is simply part of a circulating data stream. Its particular content is irrelevant. Who sent it is irrelevant. Who receives it is irrelevant. That it need be responded to is irrelevant. The only thing that is relevant is circulation, the addition to the pool. Any particular contribution remains secondary to the fact of circulation.¹¹²

Dean is specifically referring to the internet (especially social networking), print and broadcast media here. However, just as these formats repeatedly re-

¹⁰⁹ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 67-68.

¹¹⁰ Bishop, 2004, 68.

¹¹¹ Jodi Dean, ‘Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics’, in *Cultural Politics*, Vol. 1, Issue. 1, pp. 51-74.

¹¹² Dean, p. 58.

iterate an injunction to “keep communicating!” whilst diluting and negating the relevance of *what* we are communicating, so, ‘relational aesthetics’ risks an over-excited call to ‘keep interacting!’ whilst implicitly urging us to disregard the question of why, with whom, and what for.

Relational Art’s Exclusions

Throughout these responses to Tiravanija’s practice and the claims Bourriaud makes for it, we are confronted with an array of exclusions: cultural barriers and watchful ‘Hausmeisters’ literally exclude people from these installations; the concrete problems of space sharing (i.e. between those who need to sell and those who need to eat and sleep) are excluded from relational artwork’s idyllic ideologies of intersubjectivity; those at the bottom ‘substrate’ level of the vertical social and material systems that support relational artworks are excluded from their performances of horizontality; the antagonism inherent to and necessary for democracy is excluded in favor of a totalitarianism of conviviality; over-enthusiastic embraces of authorial openness risk excluding responses that do anything other than re-iterate the fact that the work is open; and finally, a foregrounding of relationality as the key *formal* aspect of relational artworks might end up excluding our abilities to actually relate to each other within them. In responding to this list of exclusions, I will now focus on the ways in which the management and openness of relational art and participatory is theorized. This leads to the proposition that these theorizations of the social turn in art and performance exclude work in which the line between the authority of the artist and the agency of the participant is unclear. My argument reinforces the importance of participation-as-research because

it suggests that one can only really find out about the boundaries and malleability of a participatory performance or relational artwork by getting involved and testing them.

Management and Unexpectedness

In the following section I return to the alleged exclusions that arise when artists and critics focus on and prioritise 'openness'. I work from Bishop's suggestion that in Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, 'the meaning of the work becomes so synonymous with the fact that its meaning is 'open' that it ends up foreclosing its open-endedness.¹¹³ Following relational aesthetic's apparent bias for 'use' over 'contemplation', I shift the focus of this suggestion away from meaning-making and onto action and interaction. This leads to the argument that the more 'open' a relational artwork claims to be about how we act and interact within it the less impact our actions and interactions might actually have. In this section I frame the potential use-value of a relational artwork as residing not, as Bourriaud (and Kester) would have it, in its efficacy as a space for rehearsing ideal ways of being with each other (enacting 'ways of living and models of action within the existing real'),¹¹⁴ but as a space for trying out methods of political resistance and social disobedience. My specific interest is in the potential for artworks and performances that, at first, seem to have a limiting and manipulative impact on what participants can or should do, to be revealed as malleable, extendable and undoable in response to

¹¹³ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 62, n. 30.

¹¹⁴ Bourriaud, p. 13.

participants' actions and interactions. I develop this argument through a comparison between an account that Jackson gives of an incident in Santiago Sierra's installation *9 Forms of 100 x 100 x 600 cm Each, Constructed to Be Supported Perpendicular to a Wall* (June 2002, Deitch Projects, New York, USA) and a description of and reflection on one of my own experience of participation.¹¹⁵ *9 Forms* was an installation that required eighteen people, hired through an 'employment agency', to hold the titular beams against a wall.¹¹⁶ The participatory performance I experienced was called *Outside In* (2014) (mentioned on page 3 of my introduction to this thesis) by photographer and performance artist Bjørn Venø. Venø is a London-based artist who has presented photography, performances, and workshops internationally since 2004.

Bourriaud distinguishes between interactive artworks that embrace the unpredictability of bringing people together or inviting them to interact, and those that attempt a stricter or more deceptive organisation, control or manipulation of individuals and their interactions with the artwork and/or each other. He writes that a 'work may operate like a relational device containing a certain degree of randomness, or a machine provoking and managing individual and group encounters'.¹¹⁷ This suggests that user-friendliness is connected to clarity around how much freedom we have when participating. For Bourriaud, defining and knowing how, and to what extent we can 'use' the

¹¹⁵ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 70-72.

¹¹⁶ Phoebe Hoban, 'How Far is Too Far?' *Artnews* 107:7, Summer 2008, <<http://www.artnews.com/2008/07/01/how-far-is-too-far/>>, [accessed 29/09/2014].

¹¹⁷ Bourriaud, p. 30.

various elements and objects of a relational installation is important. At first Tiravanija's practice seems to fit the latter of Bourriaud's distinctions, being reasonably unrestrictive in the way participants might respond to the offer of curry or accommodation. However, Kester's observation of 'stern Hausmeisters' suggests more management is occurring than it might seem at first. Another of Bourriaud's examples of a relational installation working with a looser 'relational device' would be Lincoln Tobier, who, on several occasions 'set up a radio station in art galleries, and invited the public to a discussion then broadcasted over the airwaves'.¹¹⁸ An example of a more manipulative and provocative approach to interactivity described by Bourriaud would be Angus Fairhurst's interventionist installation which used 'airwave-pirating equipment' to link two galleries together via their telephones.¹¹⁹ The system was rigged so that each person 'thought it was the other person who had called, so their exchanges would end up in an improbable misunderstanding'.¹²⁰ Bourriaud provides a useful example of a relational artwork that leans towards provocation and management: *untitled (Blue Mirror)* by Félix González-Torres (introduced above). The installation consisted of a pile of blue posters that visitors were allowed to take away. The options of interactivity seem to be quite limited here: you can either take a poster, or not. Therefore it would be inappropriate to identify this piece with the 'randomness' of interactivity, despite the fact that visitor's interactions significant impact upon the work (diminishing it or even getting rid of it altogether). I refer to *Untitled (Blue Mirror)* here because Bourriaud asks two

¹¹⁸ Bourriaud, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ Bourriaud, p. 32.

¹²⁰ Bourriaud, p. 32.

important rhetorical questions in response to it. These questions have particular relevance to my own approach to 'openness'. The first is 'what happens if lots of visitors walk off in turn with these sheets of paper offered to an abstract public?' The second asks what 'process would cause the piece to change and then vanish?'¹²¹ These questions are important to me because of my interest in relational art and participatory performance that survive and thrive upon what might at first seem to be destructive actions by participants. In such practices, the response to these questions would focus on the ability of the piece to become something else, something unexpected that is partially authored by the participant. This is why I focus on interactive art and performances in which the distinction between unexpectedness and 'management' is revealed to be less clear. I am interested in participatory art and performance in which a sense of awkwardness might arise in response to an ambiguity around how much agency and control artists or participants have over the outcomes and effects of 'relational devices': not because they don't have agency, but because they are unsure of the parameters of their participation.

It is important to briefly clarify here that this observation of a limited interaction in González-Torres' installation is no way a value judgement. The work is exemplary of a practice in which, as Bourriaud explains, 'the most personal and complex memories' are turned into 'clear, spare forms'.¹²² The heightened and foregrounded inter-relation between the presence of others and an inevitable loss in *Untitled (Blue Mirror)* emerges from an on-going

¹²¹ Bourriaud, p. 49.

¹²² Bourriaud, p. 51.

engagement with the theme, as described by Bourriaud, of the artists experiences of homosexual love and cohabitation, which he offers as a universal model for living.¹²³ Whilst Bourriaud warns of the ‘currently widespread trend’ of reducing Gonzales-Torres’ practice to a ‘neo-formalist set of problems or an agenda for gay activism’, it would be more problematic to reduce it to its structure as a relational device and a limited invitation to interact. This is the reduction that Bishop accuses Bourriaud of making:

Through this work, Gonzales-Torres made subtle allusions to politically charged issues such as the AIDS crisis (a pile of sweets matched the weight of his partner Ross, who died in 1991), urban violence (handgun laws in *Untitled [NRA]* [1991]), and homosexuality (*Perfect Lovers* [1991]). Bourriaud, however, demotes this aspect of Gonzales-Torres’s practice in favor of its “structure”—its literal generosity toward the viewer.¹²⁴

This an important point to make, because in my own engagement with the modes and structures of inter-relational interactions in performance practices that do not foreground themselves as relational (such as Hoyle’s), I am not aiming to bracket out or neglect other key themes and formal and material attributes. I focus on moments of interactivity, participation, and social engagement in such practices whilst acknowledging that these structural and methodological aspects are there to support a range of other themes, materials and aesthetics.

¹²³ Bourriaud, p. 50.

¹²⁴ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 64, n. 36.

Relational Aesthetics as Delegated Labour, Theatre as Relational Aesthetics

As a means of exemplifying this focus, and in arguing for the efficacy of this approach, I will reflect on two moments in participatory performances in which provocative and tightly managed modes of participation abruptly switched into seemingly unexpected acts of interactivity from participants or collaborators. The first focuses on a moment, described by Jackson, in which a group of participants ‘call the bluff’ of Sierra’s socio-political contextualising of his own practice.¹²⁵ The second, as mentioned, documents my own response to being invited to participate in Bjørn Venø’s provocative piece *Outside In* at the Flying Dutchman, London (23 June, 2014). After describing these examples, I use this opportunity to explain my turn towards practices that seem to fall outside of the remit of relational aesthetics and have a less-than-obvious relationship to the social turn in art and performance. I then outline my argument for how I think user-friendliness should emerge and function in relation to the ‘managed/random’ or ‘invited/provoked’ binaries that Bourriaud sets up. However, just before describing these installations and performances in relation to user-friendliness, manipulation, and openness, I want to outline some of my thinking in selecting them as examples. This is because, in following a method of argument that continues throughout this thesis, these examples lie outside of Bourriaud’s remit for relational aesthetics.

Sierra’s installations focus on the relation between collaborators/employees, the artwork in which they are employed, and the gallery attendees who

¹²⁵ Jackson, *Social Works*, pp. 70-71.

observe those artworks (as opposed to an inter-relation between participants, or a relation between participants and artists). It does not appear to invite gallery visitors to interact with the work or its employees, nor foreground gallery visitor's interactions with each other as a part of the artwork's material. However, it is a relevant work to bring in here because of its unique relation to manipulation and randomness, as grounded in its use of delegation. Also, following Harvie's framing of participation as free labour in participatory performance, there is no reason why we might not also think of the participants in one of Bourriaud's relational artworks as labourers in the same way that Sierra's employees are (Bourriaud's are just unpaid).¹²⁶ Of course, when we are invited, for example, to eat curry cooked by an artist, we are not involved in physical labour or made to follow instructions dutifully. However, following Harvie, I would argue that we are still subservient to the installation, particularly because it relies on our interaction in order to exist: without the visitor's complicity there is no relational artwork. There are many obvious differences (primarily related to privilege and access) between Sierra's participants' and Tiravanija's (differences Sierra's practice foregrounds and relies on) but both sets of participants are working to initiate and perpetuate the artworks in which they find themselves. This is why it is relevant to discuss Sierra's practice in relation to Bourriaud's observations and claims.

Venø's performance also lies outside Bourriaud's criteria, primarily because it did not occur within the context of art galleries, markets, and biennales that frame relational aesthetics. In fact, *Outside In* falls on the 'theatre' side of

¹²⁶ Harvie, p. 42-43.

Bourriaud's differentiation between theatre and art exhibitions, a distinction based on different manifestations of consumption and conversation:

Actually, [in theatre and cinema] there is no live comment made about what is seen (the discussion time is put off until after the show). At an exhibition, on the other hand, even when inert forms are involved, there is the possibility of an immediate discussion, in both senses of the term.¹²⁷

Venø's performance was much closer to embracing the blurring of and resistance to categorisation related to Live Art than being a piece of theatre. However, it was an on-stage performance, and this, along with his authoritative presence and a sustained sense of reverence, did make live commentary difficult and seemingly unwelcome. Bourriaud's distinction, based on when and where we might inter-subjectively reflect on the work, seems fair. However, writers on the social turn in art and performance who have an academic investment in the theatre world, as opposed to the visual art world, often reiterate Nicholas Ridout's claim that theatre was 'always already relational, long before Nicolas Bourriaud proclaimed the arrival of relational aesthetics'.¹²⁸ Ridout focuses on experimental theatre practices, such as Peter Handke's, in which 'theatre is not where we go to see stories acted out, although that might happen, it is where we go to watch ourselves watching and being watched'.¹²⁹ The crossovers between such theatre and relational art works is summarized in Ridout's claim that theatre practices can be 'about

¹²⁷ Bourriaud, p. 16.

¹²⁸ Nicholas Ridout 'You look charming. Nicholas Ridout on Art and Theatre', *Tate Online*, Issue 11, Autumn 2009, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue11/artandtheatre.htm>> [accessed 16/03/2009].

¹²⁹ Ridout.

what it means to participate, as singular individuals, in the formation of a public through the medium of the real, live encounter'.¹³⁰ Jackson focuses on theatre as an exemplary space in which to experience a foregrounding of issues of substrate and support as discussed above. She is interested in the emphasis on the 'actor and acting as material substrates', and following this notes, similarly to Ridout, that 'certainly most anyone in theatre knows that Rirkrit Tiravanija was not the first to notice that "material" could be "lots of people"'.¹³¹ Thus, bringing people together and asking them to reflect on being brought together is an aim that spans across relational art, art works that foreground delegation and employment, and theatre, even if in the theatre talking about being brought together happens after the event. In summary, turning to examples that do not fit neatly under the term 'relational aesthetics' serves to challenge the uniqueness of its remit, as well as constructing new criteria through which to discuss its socio-political efficacies.

Bluff-Calling in 9 Forms

In the second chapter of *Social Works: Performing, Supporting Publics*, Jackson discusses Sierra's *9 Forms*.¹³² It is part of a series of installations in which Sierra facilitates and displays problematic modes of labour, delegation, exploitation, and economic precarity. Other controversial installations, celebrated by Bishop due to their explicit social antagonisms,¹³³ include *Eight*

¹³⁰ Ridout.

¹³¹ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 38.

¹³² Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 70-72.

¹³³ Bishop, 'Antagonism', pp. 78-79; *Installation Art*, pp. 120-122.

People Paid to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes (Guatemala, 1999) and *250cm Line Tattooed on Six Paid People* (Havana, 1999). For Bishop, Sierra's work 'can be seen as a grim meditation on the social and political conditions that permit disparities in people's "prices" to emerge'.¹³⁴ For Jackson, Sierra's position is 'frustratingly self-exempting', as exemplified in his claim that the 'problem is the existence of social conditions that allow me to make this work'.¹³⁵ This is frustrating for Jackson because it suggests that these social conditions are unchangeable across different contexts and geographical locations. As a consequence Sierra's work problematically frames and reproduces social conditions as inevitably limited and limiting.¹³⁶ For Jackson the fact that, despite Sierra's claims, social conditions are subject to change, not always 'allowing' him to make this work, is exemplified by the strike that occurred during the *9 Forms* installation at Deitch Projects. In the gallery report that Jackson quotes from we learn that after initially performing their menial roles some of the paid participants dropped the beams. They then gathered together in a discussion, led by 'a distinguished African American man', about the demeaning nature of what they were being paid to do.¹³⁷ They concluded that 'it was beneath their dignity to be there as props in an artwork, and they walked off the job'.¹³⁸ In other words they forcibly interjected an unmanaged moment into a carefully managed provocation, displaying the fact that unpredictable responses were possible, if not welcome. Jackson summarises the relevance of this refusal by stating that:

¹³⁴ Bishop, 'Antagonism', p. 70.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 70.

¹³⁶ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 70.

¹³⁷ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 71.

¹³⁸ Hoban, quoted in Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 71.

At such a moment, the human materials positioned as support for the art object refused their undermounted position; using the time-based capacity for alternative action, they altered the social situation by walking out of it and, in so doing, questioned the givenness of “social conditions that allow [Sierra] to make his work”.¹³⁹

Jackson makes it clear that there is the potential for Sierra’s unrelenting indulgences in problematic modes of employment and delegation to become undone by spontaneous acts of refusal and reclamations of agency. The implication from Jackson is that socially engaged practices might better focus on the potential to change social conditions as opposed to dwelling in and re-performing their limitations.¹⁴⁰ My own interest is in relational art and participatory performance in which such ‘bluff-calling’ by participants does not destroy the installation, or bring an end to the performance, but reveals that the potential for such ‘bluff-calling’ was always, already part of the work. My own experience of attempting bluff-calling as a provoked participant in Venø’s *Outside In* goes some way to exemplifying this approach.

Outside In

Outside In took place at the Flying Dutchman, an LGBTQ friendly pub and club in Peckham, London that hosts a plethora of regular performance and art events, and weekly queer and fetish ‘play parties’.¹⁴¹ The performance was part of ‘Discharge Vs. Untouchable’, an event that brought together two of the

¹³⁹ Jackson, *Social Works*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁰ This implication was also highlighted by Jen Harvie in a panel discussion, of which Sierra was part, as part of an event entitled *On Publicness* at Tate Modern, London, UK, 29th September 2014.

¹⁴¹ ‘Flying Dutchman London’, <http://www.flyingdutchmanlondon.com/>, [accessed 29/09/2014].

pub's regular performance nights to playfully compete with each other. Thus a mischievous sensibility of friendly antagonism was built into the atmosphere of the evening, supported by the put-downs and dismissals banded playfully between the evening's curators and hosts, Live Artists Franko B (curator of 'Untouchable') and Martin O' Brien (curator of 'Discharge') as they announced their separately curated acts. Franko B had one of his own interactive installations on display. This took the form of a swing, humbly constructed from plywood and rope, and hung from the centre of the bar area. This was a remnant from a previous performance by Franko B entitled *I'm thinking of you* (National Review of Live Art, Glasgow, 13th February 2009). As a relevant side point, it is worth noting the fact that Franko B describes this performance in a way that ties in with the 'openness' assigned to the works of relational artist such as Tiravanija. His website describes the idea of the piece as being 'to allow adults to play, to forget their problems, to let go, or just to have fun - in the same way that children are allowed to'.¹⁴² Although in the past it has been Franko B, or other performers, who have sat on the swing, at the beginning of this event, B announced that anyone could go on the swing, but only if they were naked. Here participation was triggered not through an invitation or a provocation, but through mixture of manipulation and subtle goading. Exclusion was, to some extent, brutal. However, it was not facilitated through stern, gate-keeping personnel but through the personal choices and body confidence of potential participants. As in González-Torres' *Untitled* (*Blue Mirror*) the affective and conceptual core of the work was in the object

¹⁴² Franko B, 'I'm thinking of you', *Franko B – News* http://franko-b-news.blogspot.co.uk/2009/02/im-thinking-of-you_7898.html [accessed 16/10/2014].

and the invitation. Whether anyone actually took the offer up seemed almost superfluous. There was also no 'bluff' to be called: if someone had sat on the swing without taking their clothes off, it would not have revealed anything new about the performance or the themes of adulthood and fun which it evoked. This, for me, was where the importance of the work as an interactive installation lay: in the fact that those contemplating participation were not made to feel that the piece needed them, but instead that it could thrive without them (though through their interaction it might be expanded or even become something else).

About two hours after the event had started, Venø began *Outside In* by standing on the small stage at one end of the bar area. His clothes and style had a mix of Victoriana smartness, well-groomed hirsuteness, and light body-modification. His look and performance style reminded me of images of Jean-Martin Charcot's 19th-century lecture performances in which he opened his clinics on hypnosis and hysteria to physicians and the general public. Venø held himself stoic and silent in the centre of the stage, shaking his head subtly but definitively when an audience member asked if he could take photos. After scanning the group of people who were gathered stood up or, like myself, sat on the floor in front of the stage, he approached a man who became visibly guarded in his body language. Venø started his interaction with this man by staring into his eyes. He then removed the man's backpack before returning to fix his gaze. Next he removed the man's t-shirt. The man's body language grew increasingly protective and twitchy, his arms tightly folded. It was awkward. As in Owen Parry's performance, there was a sense of uneasiness

in response to the ambiguity of our responsibilities and the motivations and desires of the artist. The pattern of removing clothes and then direct eye contact (an action that appeared to simultaneously check for consent and dare for resistance) continued until Venø began working on the man's belt. At this point the man used his hands to obstruct Venø's action, signifying a clear refusal to continue. Venø immediately stopped, and returned to the stage where he collected a small black cloth bag. He then put this sack over the man's head and left him there, half dressed, in an image uncomfortably close to those that emerged from Abu Ghraib prison during the second Iraq war in March 2003. This did nothing to resolve the awkward ambiguities of the performance. Was the hood a punishment? Was this meant to frame the participant as removed from the work, or more visually present in it? Next Venø approached a girl standing behind me. The same routine occurred until the girl informed Venø that she had "had enough" when he was about to remove her bra. Franko B intermittently interjected, reminding those that Venø approached that their continued compliance was "up to them". The girl was also bedecked in a black hood. Venø then approached me, guiding me to a standing position, fumbling with a headphone cable that ran under my t-shirt and into a mobile phone in my pocket. This moment of fumbling brought a different form of awkwardness, emerging through an exposure of Venø fallibility. With a patient deliberation, occasionally interjected with other micro-moments of awkward fumbling, Venø stripped me naked. Once he had removed my underwear I walked away and sat down on Franko B's swing (located a couple of metres behind the audience). As I swung myself backwards and forwards I received a round of applause. Venø continued with

his performance, ignoring me until, after a few more bodies were fully exposed, the audience dissipated. I would describe the result of my method of something akin to finding/constructing a hidden level in a computer game.

Conclusion: The Contingency of Contingency

I have described these two scenarios next to each other because, despite not being strictly 'relational' in Bourriaud's sense, they both appear, at first, to be clear examples of what he classifies as interactive 'machines provoking and managing individual and group encounters'.¹⁴³ However, in both artworks participants managed to resist and undo that management and claim the position of provocateur for themselves. The crucial difference is that in Sierra's installation it appears to have broken the work, whereas in Venø's it revealed the performance's openness to unexpectedness and extension. This was despite its apparent, surface level signs of authority, inherent in Venø's clothes and demeanor, and the ambiguities around whether he was inviting or demanding complicity. Venø's artist statements support this reading. On his website he outlines a concept he calls the 'licensed fool', which refers to giving participants the means to use the 'Fool's tools for creative thinking, problem solving and idea development'.¹⁴⁴ My response in this performance (leaving Venø's performance and using my unclothed state to interact, instead, with Franko B's installation) was revealed not to be an act of refusal or vandalism, but to follow the unstated invitation of the work to extend its

¹⁴³ Bourriaud, p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Bjørn Venø, 'Aims', *Licensed Fool* < <http://www.bjornveno.com/> > [accessed 04/10/2014].

parameters. I had no way of knowing which of these would be the case until I walked off and my action was accepted and applauded.

I am invested in participatory artworks and performances like Venø's in which the limitations, possibilities and affects of our interactions are revealed *in the moment of interaction*, as opposed to overly determined by the artist or performer. By this, I mean that it is not so important whether a relational artwork or participatory performance initially emerges through manipulation or invitation, provocation or chance, limitations or openness, but how those artworks bend, break, are rearranged, or extended as a consequence of the way participants respond. This is why participation-as-research is important. An observing academic or one who read about a presentation of *Outside In* in which everyone had either fully refused or submitted to Venø's apparent demands might have read it as either definitively invitational and open or totalitarian and limiting. Thus, for me, a work's 'user-friendliness' should relate to the fact that the level of contingency in a relational work should *itself be contingent* on the participants' levels, actions and methods of engagement. Equally it should be possible that the level of control and management that a relational work holds over its participants is adaptable in response to participants' modes of participation. This is a proposition that lies at the heart of my engagement with the performances I discuss in the rest of this thesis. Awkwardness is key here in two ways.

Firstly, awkward modes of authority and facilitation, in which the dysfunctions and incapacities of those in charge are foregrounded, expose gaps in which

participants can test the malleability of the performance. As a dyspraxic maker of participatory performance, I am personally invested in this argument for the reasons outlined in the preface to this thesis. My dyspraxia can affect my own ability to maintain authority and facilitate situations and interactions smoothly. As stated in the preface, I have particular difficulties with executive functioning and imposing order on activities.¹⁴⁵ In this chapter I have demonstrated that the discourse around the social turn in art and performance either overlooks such awkwardness, or is critical of its ethics, efficacy and aesthetics. I am aware that such exclusions and dismissals can create or maintain the idea that those with a potentially awkward mode of being, such as dyspraxia, should not be engaged in producing or performing socially engaged, relational or participatory practices. This motivates some of the key strategies of this thesis, each of which works to break down such prejudices and barriers. These strategies include refocusing theoretical approaches to the social turn in art and performance towards practices that foreground awkward approaches to facilitation and authority, and reframing awkward facilitation and authority as efficacious. Both of these approaches act as an essential validation of such practices and practitioners.

I am also personally invested in the way that the efficacy of this awkwardness relates to the extent to which a participatory performance is malleable in response to participants actions and interactions. This means celebrating participatory practices that not only refuse to exclude certain types of

¹⁴⁵ Mazahir Mohamedal, *Working with Dyslexia: Dyslexia Assessment Consultancy, Confidential Diagnostic Assessment Report*, 29th September 2009.

participants and certain approaches to participation, but that also allow for the project to be shaped by those participants and their awkward modes of interacting. Such practices would embrace the potentially ‘irrelevant’ contributions that, according to dyspraxia expert Sharon Drew, someone with dyspraxia might make.¹⁴⁶ This is because the ‘relevancy’ of such contributions is confirmed at the moment in which the interaction occurs.

Whilst awkwardness can contribute to or expose a previously unrevealed openness to the contingencies of participation, it can also emerge as a result of such openness. In each of the main case studies addressed in this thesis (a.a.s in Chapter 3, David Hoyle in Chapter 4, and Reactor in Chapter 5) such awkwardness is discussed in relation to responsibility. This is less explicit in Chapter 3, but the awkwardness described does have a relationship to my own demands for a.a.s to take responsibility for generating clearer rules and perimeters for the project I was involved in. However, in this case openness was not generated or revealed in response to a collaborator or participant’s actions. It was identifiable as an aim from the moment one entered the project. In Chapter’s 4 and 5 I address the relationship between awkwardness, authority and responsibility more directly and explicitly. Both of these chapter’s utilise the Lacanian concept of the fallibility of the ‘big Other’, and Slavoj Žižek’s supplementation of it. The primary aim of the next chapter is to map out these psychoanalytic theories

¹⁴⁶ Sharon Drew, ‘Dyspraxia’, in *Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Positive Responses to Specific Learning Differences* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), pp. 91-123 (p. 109).

Chapter 2

Psychoanalysis and Participatory Performance

In April 2011 I participated in Adrian Howell's *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding*. It occurred as part of the Battersea Art Centre's One-on-One Festival, which ran from 29 March – 9 April 2011. Howell's specialised in creating physically and emotionally intimate interactive performances since 2000, when he shifted his practice away from the more conventional audience/actor set-ups he was working within. Since then Howell's often used the 'one to one' format, in which a performance includes a single performer and a single audience member.

The BAC One-on-One Festival was themed around the idea of a 'menu' from which audience members selected particular experiences, such as 'Challenging', 'Immersing', 'Technologised' or 'Personal'. Each of these experiences consisted of three performances in which there was always only one performer and one audience member. There was one 20-30 minute performance (the 'Main Course') and two that lasted between five and ten minutes. There were also various interventions, installations, and wandering performances scattered around the venue, all based on the one-to-one format, and which you could experience in the gaps between scheduled performances. I selected 'Intimate', in which Howell's performance was the 'Main Course'. The two 'Side Dishes' were Deborah Pearson's *Indiscreet* and Barnaby Stone's *A Little Bit of a Beautiful Thing*. In Pearson's performance I sat on a wooden chair in BAC's kitchen eavesdropping on an out-of-sight

conversation that was gradually revealed to be a tightly scripted performance. Stone's performance took place in a small room decked out to function as a woodwork studio. There was a large oak beam in the space. Stone addressed me warmly and informally. He told me about the history of the oak beam, which was 700 years old and formerly part of an Elizabethan hall. We chatted about the beam's history and the way it connects us with the past. I was asked to select a small wooden peg from a collection. My selected peg was hammered into the end of the beam where a collection of other pegs, presumably from other participants, had also been hammered in. Stone then used a large mechanical saw to slice off a very thin slice of the wood, which I was invited to take away with me. This, I assume, was the titular 'Little Bit of a Beautiful Thing'.

Howell's was the last performance. I knew in advance that I would be bathed naked (though I could choose to wear a swimming costume) and that the experience was meant to be reminiscent of therapy. I went to the performance expecting it to offer an ideal case-study for my research into awkwardness, imagining that I would write about the disavowed uneasiness of intimacy. However, it turned out to be the least awkward of all the performances I experienced as part of my research. The content of the performance was written out on a sheet of paper that you could read before entering. The rules were made clear, and the potential for embarrassment addressed: there was to be no touching of genitals. I entered a waiting room where I was to remove my clothes and put on a white dressing gown. I then knocked at the door to the performance space and Howells, also dressed in a dressing gown,

opened it. The room was decorated with rose petals, gently scented with lavender, and had a large bath in the centre. He removed my dressing gown and gently directed me into the bath, where I closed my eyes and was bathed. After drying, Howells invited me to sit close to him as he embraced me and then fed me a chocolate. Howells was confident, open, and projected an exuberant sense of his desire to provide care. It was therapeutic: I left feeling tingling, warmed, and de-stressed.

Other participants, however, have mentioned a sense of awkwardness. This was not, as might be expected, linked to the act of being naked in front of a stranger. Instead it occurred because there was, for those participants, an insistent, and unsettled questioning of Howell's motivations. Christine Twite writes:

To be bathed by a stranger is one thing, to be held in an embrace, which to me signifies strong intimacy and love, is quite another. I froze as Howells pulled me into his chest. Half of my consciousness was busily linking our positioning with the pieta, searching for some kind of artistic meaning within the work to interpret and externalise the experience.¹

Jonny Ensall, who experienced the performance as part of the 2011 Edinburgh Fringe Festival (26 August 2011) recalls 'I think to myself, as I'm lying in the bath covered in petals, there has to be a catch'.² Ensall continues,

¹ Christine Twite, 'The One-on-One Festival at BAC', *Cultures of Spectatorship* < <https://culturesofspectatorship.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/the-one-on-one-festival-at-bac> > [accessed 20 August 2012].

² Jonny Ensall, 'The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding: A Cure for Loneliness', *The List* < <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/37152-the-pleasure-of-being-washing-feeding-holding/> > [accessed 20 August 2012].

asking 'Is he doing it purely for the thrill of participatory theatre, or for deeper reasons?'³ I have chosen to open with Howells' performance because it merges the approaches to desire and approaches to neighbourly love that Claire Bishop keeps separate in her favouring of artists who maintain a 'fidelity to a singularised desire'.⁴ I am interested in the way that, despite the clear position of the performance as therapeutic and benevolent, some participants, such as Twite and Ensall, have the urge to identify Howell's specific desires in facilitating that experience. I come back to these points in the conclusion to this chapter. I engage with the relationship between awkwardness and the pursuit of hidden, or undisclosed meanings, motivations, and desires throughout the rest of this thesis. This chapter traces the potentials of psychoanalytic approaches to desire from the kind prompted by Twite and Ensall, in which we search for hidden desires, and hidden reasons behind those desires, through to an engagement with desire as relational.

In the following I spend considerable time tracing and describing the Freudian roots of various psychoanalytic approaches to participatory art and performance. This, along with the previous chapter's outline of theoretical approaches to the social turn provides essential contextualisation for the performance-led engagements of the chapters that follow. I begin with an introduction to some of the reductive psychoanalytic approaches to art that have occurred in the past. I then briefly outline some of the ways in which

³ Ensall.

⁴ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 39.

psychoanalysis has already been used in response to relational art and participatory performance in the discourses around the social turn in art and performance, as introduced in my first chapter. This segues into an account of the emergence of the Lacanian theories of desire, the super-ego, and the 'big Other'. This is because these theories are key to Claire Bishop's approach to the ethics of participatory arts practices. This approach can be summarised in Bishop's proposition that 'the best socially collaborative art does not derive from a super-egoic injunction to "love thy neighbour," but from the position of "do not give up on your desire."' ⁵ This approach is, in turn, heavily influential in my own development of various 'ideals' for working with participation.

The Potential Pitfalls of Psychoanalysis

In *Artificial Hells* Claire Bishop states that it has become 'unfashionable to import psychoanalysis into readings of art and artists, but the discipline provides a useful vocabulary for diagnosing the heightened ethical scrutiny that so much participatory art engenders.' ⁶ Cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek outlines the potential reasons for a more general 'death of psychoanalysis' in his introduction to *How to Read Lacan*. ⁷

⁵ Claire Bishop in Jennifer Roche, 'Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop', *Community Arts Network* <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/07/socially_engage.php> [accessed 02/10/2010].

⁶ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 39.

⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), p. 1.

It seems that it is [out-dated] on three connected levels: (1) of scientific knowledge, where the cognivist-neurobiologist model of the human mind appears to supersede the Freudian model; (2) of the psychiatric clinic, where psychoanalytic treatment is rapidly losing ground to pills and behavioural therapy; (3) of the social context, where the Freudian image of a society and social norms that repress the individual's sexual drives no longer seems a valid account of today's predominant hedonistic permissiveness.⁸

Despite his clear outline of the outdated position of psychoanalysis, Žižek almost immediately follows this by stating his aim 'to demonstrate that it is only today that the time for psychoanalysis has come.'⁹ Before outlining and diving into the vocabulary and concepts of this Žižekian/Lacanian approach and introducing a rationale for employing them, I will confront one of the potential pitfalls of importing psychoanalysis into reading art and performance. Thus I begin this section by briefly outlining a model for using psychoanalysis as a critical approach to art and performance that is deemed to be inappropriate and ineffective, and which might go some way to accounting for its 'unfashionable' status. This gives me something to work against for the rest of the chapter, but also sets up the groundwork for some of the other psychoanalytical concepts and theories that I refer to throughout the rest of this thesis.

The problematic psychoanalytic approach to performance that I describe here can be summarised as a framing of an artist's practice as a symptom of an artist's psychological complexes. In other words, approaching the artwork or performance as an unconscious message that those versed in psychoanalytic theory can decipher in order to gain access to the artist's psyche. A brief

⁸ Žižek, p. 2.

⁹ Žižek, p. 2.

focus on this approach will enable me to differentiate Žižek's, Lacan's and my own use of psychoanalytic tools and vocabularies from that of the art critic as amateur clinician. The specificities of this approach are outlined in the sections below in which it is put to work in response to specific experiences of participatory art and performance.

This section focuses more often on the Freudian concepts that are points of origin for these approaches. It acts as a reference for other sections in the thesis where I identify where psycho-pathologising accounts are given of participatory artworks and performances. As Dylan Evans points out in his entrance on 'art' in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, the idea of art offering an access point for an artist's psyche can be traced back to Sigmund Freud's framing of art as 'sublimation'.¹⁰ Freud discusses the concept of sublimation and its relationship to art in 'Civilisation and its Discontent'.¹¹ One of the key arguments of Freud's text is that, in order for a civilisation to emerge and to function effectively, we must inhibit certain libidinal needs, desires, and aims. I focus on the development of this argument in my section on the super-ego below. The key point, for now, is that, for Freud, this inhibition leads to an 'undeniable diminution in the

¹⁰ Dylan Evans, 'art', *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 13-14 (p. 79).

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Civilisation and its Discontents' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilisation and its Discontents and Other Works*, ed and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 57-145 (p. 79).

potentials of enjoyment'.¹² This theory is linked to Freud's concepts of the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle'.

The 'pleasure principle' refers to the psyches' 'strive towards attaining pleasure' and our psychical avoidance of 'any event which might arouse unpleasure'.¹³ It is the pursuance of our wishes in a 'hallucinatory manner' through, for example, our 'dream-thoughts every night'.¹⁴ The 'reality principle' emerges through the dissatisfaction that arises from this 'hallucinatory' pursuit.¹⁵ We suffer because there is 'no chance at all' of the pleasure principle being carried through to full realisation: 'all the regulations of the universe run counter to it'.¹⁶ Freud outlines three causes for the inevitable restrictions to the pleasure principle: our bodies inevitable decay and reliance on pain and anxiety as 'warning signals', the restriction and 'merciless forces of destruction' of the external world, and other people.¹⁷ Freud focuses on the third of these in *Civilisation and its Discontent*, and, due to its relevance for art and performance that foreground inter-relationality, I return to the problem of 'other people' at length in my fifth chapter. Overall, Freud suggests that in response to the suffering we experience as a result of barriers to our pursuit of pleasure, we 'decide to form a conception of the real circumstances of the

¹² Freud, 'Civilisation', p. 79.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XII (1911-1913): Case History of Schreber, Papers on Techniques and Other Works*, ed and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 213- 226 (p. 219).

¹⁴ Freud, 'Two Principles', p. 219.

¹⁵ Freud, 'Two Principles', p. 219.

¹⁶ Freud, 'Civilisation', p. 76.

¹⁷ Freud, 'Civilisation', p. 76.

external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them'.¹⁸ Thus the 'pleasure principle' is, 'under the influence of the external world, changed into the more modest reality principle'.¹⁹

Freud goes on to suggest that one technique for avoiding the suffering that comes through the loss of an unfulfilled pursuit of pleasure is to shift 'the instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world'.²⁰ We adapt and remould our libidinal pleasures in order to make them realisable in external 'reality'. It is this 'shift' of libidinal aims that Freud refers to as 'sublimation'. Sublimation is one method for transforming the pleasure principle into the reality principle: the 'instinct is said to be sublimated in so far as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and in so far as its objects are socially valued ones'.²¹ Freud states that art is one way of enacting this sublimation, bringing about a 'reconciliation of the two principles [pleasure and reality] in a peculiar way'.²²

Thus a psychoanalytic engagement with art that maintained a fidelity to Freud's approach would begin by assuming that the artwork emerged through the remoulding or diversion of an inhibited desire. It would follow Freud's framing of the artist:

¹⁸ Freud, 'Two Principles', p. 219.

¹⁹ Freud, 'Civilisation', p. 77.

²⁰ Freud, 'Civilisation', p. 79.

²¹ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Sublimation' in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1973), pp. 431-433 (p. 431).

²² Freud, 'Two Principles', p. 220.

An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of fantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality.²³

Such a reading would then look for clues in the artwork that would reveal what these remoulded 'erotic and ambitious wishes' are. As Anthony Storr points out in his short introductory guide to Freud, one example of 'both the insights and the limitations of this approach' can be found in Freud's own analysis of the artistic and scientific pursuits of Leonardo Da Vinci.²⁴

Early in the essay Freud suggests that Da Vinci's excessive commitment to his work is exemplary of the 'special disposition' in which the libido evades the fate of repression by being 'sublimated from the very beginning into curiosity and by becoming attached to the powerful instinct for research as a reinforcement'.²⁵ In working to pinpoint the sublimated libidinal aim Freud focuses on a childhood recollection that Da Vinci inserted into one of his scientific notebooks. The story recalls one of Da Vinci's earliest memories (presumed to be a fictional account, due to its content) in which, whilst in his cradle, a vulture came down, opened Da Vinci's mouth with his tail, and struck him 'many times with its tail' against his lips.²⁶ For Freud, the repressed desire

²³ Freud, 'Two Principles', p. 220.

²⁴ Anthony Storr, *Freud: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 95.

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo Da Vinci and a memory of his childhood', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XI (1910): Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 57-138 (p. 80).

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 82.

revealed in this fictional story is Da Vinci's 'inclination to take a man's organ in his mouth and suck on it'.²⁷ Freud arrives at this reading through firstly noting that a tail is 'one of the most familiar symbols and substitutive expressions for the male organ'.²⁸ Further to this, he links the vulture to Da Vinci's experiences of his relationship with his mother, by pointing out that in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the vulture represents the mother.²⁹ Thus Freud goes on to connect the desire to fellate with an infant's desire to suckle on his or her mother's nipple.³⁰

Da Vinci's penchant for Vultures is, for Freud, further evidenced through an observation by Oskar Pfister of Da Vinci's painting *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (circa 1508), in which he sees the outline of a vulture in Mary's 'curiously arranged and rather confusing drapery'.³¹ This psychoanalytic reading of the story and the details in the painting, coupled with some historical research that, for Freud, indicated Da Vinci's homosexuality, leads to the following proposition:

When we remember the historical probability of Leonardo having behaved in his life as one who was emotionally homosexual, the question is forced upon us whether this phantasy does not indicate the existence of a causal connection between Leonardo's relation with his mother and his later manifest, if ideal [sublimated], homosexuality.³²

²⁷ Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 86.

²⁸ Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 85.

²⁹ Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 88.

³⁰ Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 87.

³¹ Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 115.

³² Freud, 'Da Vinci', p. 98 ('[sublimated]' in original).

As Storr points out, unfortunately this interpretation is 'based on a mistranslation': the 'bird was not a vulture, but a kite. Whereas vultures can be shown to have mythological connections with the mother, kites cannot'.³³ This misfire, and the interpretation that surrounds it, exemplifies the crude and calamitous nature of engaging in psychoanalytic diagnoses outside of the co-present, one-to-one setting of the clinic, even if you happen to be the forefather of psychoanalysis. It is not, of course, merely the mistranslation that is the problem. It is the idea that a detail in a story and a painting can provide the trigger and fulcrum for an interpretation of an individual's sexuality and a more general proposition about how and when one's sexuality emerges.

A contemporary example of this unjustified conflation of the analyst/analysand relationship in clinical psychoanalysis and the critic/artist relationship in art criticism is to be found in the problematic approaches to the cosmetic surgery-based performance practice of ORLAN, as discussed by Dominic Johnson.³⁴ ORLAN is a French multimedia and performance artist who has been making performance work since the early 1960s. Her work is described as 'consistently feminist, questioning traditional definitions of femininity and challenging the institutions – from art historiography to the Catholic Church, to the plastic surgery industry – that produce and enforce those definitions'.³⁵ In

³³ Storr, p. 96.

³⁴ Dominic Johnson, 'PSYCHIC WEIGHT: The Pains and Pleasures of Performance', in *ORLAN: A HYBRID BODY OF ARTWORKS*, ed. by Simon Donger with Simon Shepherd and ORLAN (Oxon and NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 85-100.

³⁵ Paul Allain and Jen Harvie, eds., 'ORLAN' in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 57-59 (p. 58).

1962 she first 'reincarnated' herself by 'changing her name to the sexually ambiguous Orlan [sic]'.³⁶

In the section of his essay subtitled 'Trauma', Johnson focuses on *The Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN*, ORLAN's 'most ambitious project', which she undertook between 1990 and 1993 and which consisted of 'nine surgical procedures on her face, back, legs and other body parts'.³⁷ Johnson's own approach to this, itself rooted in psychoanalysis, focuses on ORLAN's disavowal of the importance of pain in her project. He argues that despite this disavowal, ORLAN's practice might have 'entailed one of the most sophisticated negotiations' of the "'suture' that binds pleasure and pain'.³⁸ His reference point for this theory of a 'suture' between pleasure and pain is Lacan's concept of *jouissance*. This concept has its roots in Freud's essay '*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*' and its introduction of the concept of the 'death-instinct'.³⁹ I will take this opportunity to briefly outline these concepts, as I refer to them at various points throughout the rest of the thesis.

Freud posits that the formulas of the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle' do not account for the compulsion to recollect, repeat and work 'over in the mind' painful experiences.⁴⁰ Such compulsions can be found in games in childhood and artistic 'imitation' and 'play' in adulthood in which 'the most

³⁶ Allain and Harvie, p. 58.

³⁷ Johnson, 'Psychic Weight', p. 88.

³⁸ Johnson, 'Psychic Weight', p. 86.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 1-68.

⁴⁰ Freud, 'Beyond', p. 17.

painful experiences' can be felt as 'highly enjoyable'.⁴¹ This compulsion is named the 'death-instinct' by Freud. It refers to the subject's drive to go beyond the limits of the pleasure principle and 'return' to an 'inanimate state'.⁴² Freud differentiates the 'death-instinct' from the 'life-instinct' – a term which incorporates both self-preservation (the 'ego-instinct') and sexual instincts. Lacan develops Freud's concept of the death-instinct (translated as the 'death-drive') by detaching it from the biological instinct to 'return to the inanimate' and undo its distinction from the 'sexual drives'.⁴³

Jouissance refers to the experience of following the death drive and going 'beyond the pleasure principle'.⁴⁴ Lacan observes that Freud's 'pleasure principle' embodied an allusion to a 'beyond' even before the 'formulations of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*', because it is really a formulation of a 'least-suffering principle'.⁴⁵ Here Lacan is referring to Freud's development of the theory of the pleasure principle in 'Civilisation and its Discontents'. The 'pleasure principle' manages and limits our desires and enjoyments, ensuring they do not disturb our place in 'civilisation' through the formation of boundaries between them and the external world. *Jouissance* pursues pleasure beyond these limitations and boundaries, and in this sense, is

⁴¹ Freud, 'Beyond', p. 17.

⁴² Freud, 'Beyond', p. 46.

⁴³ Dylan Evans, 'Death Drive', *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 33-34 (p. 34).

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 184.

⁴⁵ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 185.

‘uncivilised’. It does not inhibit itself in response to others, and therefore it ‘is suffering because it involves suffering for my neighbor’.⁴⁶

Johnson’s approach to *jouissance* is not based on framing ORLAN’s practice in terms of her own relationship to pleasure, pain and ‘civilisation’. It does not frame *The Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN* as a pursuit of *jouissance* or use its details to make assumptions about her unconscious relationships to pleasure and pain. Instead he demonstrates the ways in which ORLAN’s project initiates ‘an otherwise unavailable understanding of the body, identity, or desire’.⁴⁷ Hence, Johnson’s analysis exemplifies a revelatory and productive use of the tools and vocabulary of psychoanalysis. By, in his own words, resisting the ‘urge to pathologize the artist’, he demonstrates a psychoanalytic approach that reveals a performances’ unique provocations and production of knowledge.⁴⁸ This is an approach I aim to partly emulate in my own use of psychoanalysis.

Johnson goes on to critique two approaches that exemplify a failure to resist this ‘urge to pathologize’. These are by Kristine Stiles and Renata Salecl. Stiles’ approach involves a ‘reactionary critique of ORLAN’s post-surgical documentation’ in which she insists on reading them as ‘proof of sexual abuse’.⁴⁹ Johnson summarises Stiles’ approach as a ‘pseudo-psychiatric’ account, suggesting that its ‘logic of “self-harm”’ is a ‘mostly punitive

⁴⁶ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 185.

⁴⁷ Johnson, ‘Psychic Weight’, p. 91.

⁴⁸ Johnson, ‘Psychic Weight’, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Johnson, ‘Psychic Weight’, p. 92.

discourse that aims to pathologize invasive knowledge of one's own body'.⁵⁰

Salecl is also accused of indulging in a problematically pathologizing approach, diagnosing 'body art, and by extension any act that employs body modification' as 'an effect of clinical neurosis'.⁵¹ For Johnson, Salecl's approach is most damaging when she compares ORLAN's objection to accusations of self-mutilation to defenders of clitoridectomy. This conflation of two very different practices with significantly different contexts amounts to 'punishing the artist for her work, whilst aestheticizing the experiences of women in non-western cultures'.⁵² Johnson wraps up his critique of these approaches by pointing out that Salecl's use of psychoanalysis is inherently 'flawed' because it attributes concepts such as 'neurosis', 'psychosis', and 'perversion' to 'acts that take place within the mediated realm of artistic expression'.⁵³

I have brought in Johnson's article not only to give a contemporary example of the framing of art as a gateway to an artist's psyche and a clearly outlined critique of such approaches. I also refer to it because there are overlaps between Johnson's psychoanalytic approach to art and performance that includes live, wounded bodies, or bodies in the process of modification, and my own framing of participatory art and performance. One of these overlaps lies in Johnson's observation of the inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that the acts of wounding and body modification that both him and Salecl discuss occur within the 'mediated realm of artistic representation'. The

⁵⁰ Johnson, 'Psychic Weight', p. 92.

⁵¹ Johnson, 'Psychic Weight', pp. 92-93.

⁵² Johnson, 'Psychic Weight' p. 93.

⁵³ Johnson, 'Psychic Weight' p. 93.

implication is that the act of cutting oneself as part of an art work or performance should be approached with a radically different criteria to the act of cutting oneself outside of this context.

The 'realm' of art (and performance) to which Johnson refers is, of course, a complex and contested one to define. But I agree with the position that actions and interactions that occur as or within an artwork or performance cannot be assumed to emerge from the same motivations and intentions, or have the same affects, as those not framed in this way. Therefore I insist that relations of power, control, and delegation in participatory art and performance should not be critiqued or evaluated in the same way that one might approach such social structures in scenarios that are not contextualised as artworks or performance. As Johnson argues, psychoanalytic approaches to performance and art that incorporate wounds and body modification risk reductively framing those materials as indicators of repressed histories of trauma and violence.⁵⁴ One can imagine a similarly problematic approach to Howells' performance and intimate interactive art and performance in general. This would revolve around ascertaining what desires lie behind the artist's pursuits of intimacy with strangers, and presumptively tracing the roots of those desires, as opposed to understanding intimacy as a core material in the artist's practice. Further to this I propose that with participatory art and performance there is a similar risk of reduction and misdirection when it is approached through purely sociological models of art and performance theory and criticism. Of course such readings, especially when employed to examine

⁵⁴ Johnson, 'Psychic Weight', p. 92.

the material conditions of an artwork or performance (as opposed to the artwork's or performance's materials and content), can contribute valuable insights into their complicity with or opposition to dominant ideologies and social structures. However, they also risk reducing these practices to being merely the product and/or perpetuator of a flawed society.

In Jen Harvie's *Fair Play* for example, there is a conflation of the experience of the precarious and exploited worker in neoliberal modes of employment and the experience of participants who are asked to contribute to or collaborate in a performance, sometimes in laborious or unglamorous ways:

Thus, like [Richard] Sennett's worker in the institutions of the new capitalism, the audience member in emerging participatory and art 'abandon[s] past experience' and relinquishes the opportunity to 'take pride in being good at something specific' (Sennett, 2006, p.5). The audience member as worker in this flexible art and performance economy is rendered, in many ways, insecure, deskilled and alienated.⁵⁵

Harvie gives the example of Uninvited Guests' performance *The Good Neighbour* (Battersea Arts Centre, London, 2012), in which a 'handful of audience members were asked to carry large and cumbersome musical instruments embedded with speakers which played out soundtracks to accompany scenes'.⁵⁶ For Harvie such 'subservient' participation exemplifies a problematic 'delegation of labour to audiences who are usually unpaid and, indeed often *paying*'.⁵⁷ Harvie is open to the idea that the kinds of 'uneven

⁵⁵ Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 47.

⁵⁶ Harvie, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Harvie, p. 41. Emphasis in original.

power dynamics' exemplified in *The Good Neighbour* 'sometimes constructively draws attention to such inequalities and to the complicated ways that people can find themselves inadvertently embedded in them'.⁵⁸ However, Harvie's focus is mainly on the ways such delegation in participatory art and performance 'can exploit free labour in ways that replicate, extend and potentially naturalize exploitative trends in contemporary labour markets more broadly'.⁵⁹ For me this position on participation as 'free labour' risks, to rephrase Johnson's approach to Salecl, "punishing the artist for their work, whilst aestheticizing the experiences of precarious, exploited labourers".

I aim to differentiate my position from Harvie's by framing the modes and details of delegation, participation, and collaboration as *materials* for the creation of social structures as artworks and performance. This position has similarities to WochenKlausur's who insist that their direct, ameliorative responses to localised social problems are 'art'. WochenKlausur state, in response to the question 'Does the external form, the outward appearance, still have any significance at all for activist art?', that 'form' 'is of 'tertiary importance today'.⁶⁰ However, they also insist that 'the potential to manipulate social circumstances is a practice of art just as valid as the manipulation of

⁵⁸ Harvie, p. 43.

⁵⁹ Harvie, p. 41.

⁶⁰ WochenKlausur, 'Does the external form, the outward appearance, still have any significance at all for activist art?', *WochenKlausur: FAQ* <http://www.wochenklausur.at/faq_detail.php?lang=en&id=18> [accessed 10 October 2012].

traditional materials'.⁶¹ Thus 'social circumstances' are framed as the 'materials' of WochenKlausur's practice. This is reminiscent of Nicolas Bourriaud's framing of conviviality as a particular kind of *formal* element in Rirkrit Tiravanija's relational artworks. Here, unlike the definition that WochenKlausur use and refer to, 'form' is not reduced to the 'outward appearance'. As discussed in chapter one, Bourriaud frames 'form' as the 'bringing together' of 'heterogeneous units' on a level, in order to create a 'relationship to the world'.⁶²

The arguments developed in this chapter rely on an addition to Bourriaud's definition of form. It is also, for me, the bringing together and (re)structuring of 'heterogeneous units' in an attempt to create worlds that are distinct from the ones in which we currently co-exist and inter-relate. I write 'attempt' to acknowledge the probable impossibility of succeeding in creating and maintain this distinction. It is important to note that this is not intended as an indulgence in what Shannon Jackson describes as the 'perpetual pursuit of autonomy' that 'continues to animate a theory of democracy as well as a critical concept of aesthetics'.⁶³ My contention is not that the attempt to create a distinct world is synonymous with an attempt at autonomy. The major aim of this chapter is to explore the potential for Žižekian/Lacanian psychoanalysis to emerge as an ideal tool for affirming and critically accounting for the

⁶¹ WochenKlausur, 'From the Object to the Concrete Intervention', *WochenKlausur: Art* www.wochenklausur.at/kunst.php?lang=en [accessed 23 December 2014].

⁶² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), p. 111.

⁶³ Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing art, supporting publics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p. 35.

specificities and intricacies of the 'worlds' that are created, facilitated, manipulated and maintained in participatory art and performance.

As Johnson demonstrates, when used as a tool to critically engage with solo practices that include wounding and body modification, it risks reductively framing the details of the artwork as symptoms of damaged psyches.

However, I propose that when psychoanalysis is used as a tool to critically engage with participatory art and performance it emerges as a productive alternative to approaches that seek to frame them as naturalizing extensions or replications of damaged and damaging ideologies and social systems. This chapter should demonstrate the details and validity of this proposition, even, or especially when applied to performance and art practices in which the distinction between what is inside and what is external to the artwork or performance is ambiguous.

Psychoanalysis and the Social Turn

Neither Grant Kester nor Jen Harvie turn to psychoanalysis in their critical engagements with socially engaged and participatory art and performance.

The most explicit and elongated engagement with psychoanalysis in *Relational Aesthetics* comes towards the end of the book when Bourriaud proceeds with what he describes as a 'kind of *grafting*' of the thinking of French philosopher Felix Guattari, a critic of psychoanalysis, 'in the domain of

present-day art'.⁶⁴ Bourriaud's employment of Guattari, described as 'thinking about art with Guattari, and with the *toolbox* he has bequeathed us', closely matches my own employment or 'grafting' of a Žižekian critical toolbox in the domain of contemporary participatory art and performance.⁶⁵ Throughout Bourriaud's turn to Guattari he makes clear connections between the role, or function, of art and that of psychoanalysis (and, by implication, between the artist and the psychoanalyst). This is based firstly on what Bourriaud describes as Guattari's effort to 'de-naturalize and deterritorialize subjectivity'.⁶⁶ A *relational* approach to art is important here because of Guattari's 'plural, polyphonic definition of subjectivity':⁶⁷

Subjectivity, he [Guattari] explains, cannot exist in an independent way, and in no case can it ground the existence of the subject. It can only exist in the pairing mode: association with "*human groups, socio-economic machines, informational machines*".⁶⁸

For Bourriaud both art and psychoanalysis are connected because they are two 'sorts of subjectivity production'.⁶⁹ Both have the potential to enable us to 'learn to "*seize, enhance and reinvent*" subjectivity'.⁷⁰ A sense of awkwardness in intimate one on one encounters such as Howell's, might, if following this approach, be attached to a sense that some part of us is being scrambled or re-arranged by the experience.

⁶⁴ Bourriaud, p. 87 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁵ Bourriaud, p. 87 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁶ Bourriaud, p. 89.

⁶⁷ Bourriaud, p. 91.

⁶⁸ Bourriaud, p. 91.

⁶⁹ Bourriaud, p. 88.

⁷⁰ Bourriaud, p. 89.

Shannon Jackson's turn to psychoanalysis emerges from her focus on the 'disavowal' of the support networks ('tax breaks, military pensions, public schools, wifely labour, housekeepers, off-shoring') that sustain a 'perception of autonomy'.⁷¹ Like Bourriaud, she refers to the idea that subjectivity is inevitably entwined with the social. Whereas Bourriaud refers to Guattari in his engagement with this concept, Jackson refers to Judith Butler's insight into 'the embeddedness of interiorized selves within a network of relational fields, making the social formation of both self and field a recursive and mutually dependent operation'.⁷² Jackson explains that Butler's approach is a development of Michel Foucault's proposition that 'the concept of the individual in the individual self was in fact produced by the so-called exterior structures it would claim to oppose'.⁷³ In developing her position on support and maintenance in the arts (as discussed in chapter 1), Jackson relates these theories of subjectivity to the 'Freudian dilemmas of "anaclitic love"'.⁷⁴ In his essay 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' Freud differentiates between two types of 'object-choice' – 'narcissistic' and 'anaclitic'.⁷⁵ The term 'object-choice' refers here to the 'act of selecting a person or a type of person as love object'.⁷⁶ An 'anaclitic' object-choice refers to the 'fact that the persons who are concerned with a child's feeding, care, and protection become his earliest

⁷¹ Jackson, p. 36.

⁷² Jackson, p. 35.

⁷³ Jackson, p. 35.

⁷⁴ Jackson, p. 35.

⁷⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 67-102 (pp. 87-91).

⁷⁶ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Object-choice', in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1973), p. 277.

sexual objects'.⁷⁷ This 'original attachment' forms the basis for later 'object-choices'.⁷⁸ 'Narcissistic' object-choices refer to those who, rather than seeking a replacement mother-figure, seek '*themselves* as a love-object'.⁷⁹ In Freud's problematically deterministic approach, homosexuality is given as an example of a 'narcissistic' object-choice.⁸⁰ This accounts for Freud's focus on Da Vinci's relationship to his mother in the troubling analysis described above.

Jackson uses the concept of 'anaclitic' love when she focuses on the problem of artists pursuing autonomy from the social structures in which their projects emerge. Jackson suggests that when social systems are framed by artists as restrictive or inhibiting, the idea that the artist, and their practice, is supported and maintained by that system is unwelcome:

The problem of this semi-conscious attachment to support is that "the Child" paradoxically is annoyed to discover "his" reliance upon it. In both art projects and social projects, receivers similarly use the language of inconvenience and constraint to manage the psychic scandal of being exposed to their own disavowed dependency. It is hard to ask someone to get off your back once you realise she has your back.⁸¹

Later in *Social Works* Jackson returns to a psychoanalytic approach to issues of maintenance and support in a discussion of artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 'maintenance art', which I referred to in my section on Jackson in chapter one. Jackson refers to Ukeles' 'Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!'⁸² Written

⁷⁷ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 87.

⁷⁸ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 87.

⁷⁹ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 88.

⁸⁰ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 88.

⁸¹ Jackson, p. 37.

⁸² Jackson, p. 85.

partly in response to the challenges of being an artist and a mother, the manifesto opposed ‘two basic systems: Development and Maintenance’.⁸³ Jackson refers to the circulation of theories of ‘Freud, Lacan, and eventually Winnicott’ in both ‘art worlds and parenting circles’ at the time of Ukeles’ manifesto (1969).⁸⁴ She explains that in this manifesto ‘Ukeles trenchantly linked the animating drive of political protest and of avant-garde art with the edgier subjective pleasures of the Death Instinct’.⁸⁵ Jackson goes on to note that, in opposition to this ‘Death Instinct’:

“Life” instinct occupied a definitional zone of uncreativity, that is, the zone responsible for maintaining the creativity of others. Maintenance and the Life-Sustaining Instincts were humdrum, repetitive, earnest, lacking an edge –and notably engendered and classed.⁸⁶

Jackson praises Ukeles’ for seeking to ‘redefine the place of radicality, seeing it not in the assertion of autonomous personhood, change and disruption but in the habits of maintenance and care on which such assertions of autonomous personhood depended’.⁸⁷

Jackson focuses on contesting pursuits of individual desires and artistic autonomy with acknowledgment and foregrounding of inter-relational support and the often disavowed systems and subjects that maintain artistic practice. Put in psychoanalytic terms, she favours performances and artworks that engage directly with the tensions of anaclitic love, as opposed to that which

⁸³ Jackson, p. 85.

⁸⁴ Jackson, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Jackson, p. 86.

⁸⁶ Jackson, p. 86.

⁸⁷ Jackson, p. 86.

strives to circumnavigate the 'uncreative' zone of the 'Life Instinct' via sublimation. This seems, at least in part, to respond to Bishop's opposing position, captured in the quote referenced in the introduction to this thesis, in which she frames ideal collaborative practice as that which maintains a fidelity to the artist's desire, and not an indulgence in neighbourly love. Whilst there is no direct reference to Bishop in the sections of Jackson's book that I have discussed here, there are frequent deconstructions of Bishop's arguments throughout Jackson's writing on socially engaged performance (as discussed in Chapter One). Bishop's assertion contains references to psychoanalytic approaches to desire and the Christian concept of 'neighbourly love'. The majority of the rest of this chapter focuses on these theories.

Super-egoic Injunctions and Desire

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, after suggesting that the 'best socially collaborative art does not derive from a super-egoic injunction to "love thy neighbour," but from the position of "do not give up on your desire"', Bishop declares that the concept is not worth pursuing.⁸⁸ I suggest that part of the reason Bishop rejects the idea of explicitly discussing collaborative and participatory art through the lens of the 'desire/neighbourly love binary is that such an approach relies on the kind of assumptive psycho-pathologising discussed above. The critic or theorist who approaches art in line with Bishop's favouring of desire-pursuance over neighbour-loving would, presumably, work towards establishing which of these approaches an artist is

⁸⁸ Bishop in Roche.

taking. Framing an arts practice as a fidelity to a desire relies on establishing what an artist's desires are. Opposing that position to one of embracing social responsibility means assuming that an artist's desires do not include acting in a loving way towards one's neighbours. How, for example, do we know if Howells was bathing, hugging and feeding participants based on a pursuit of fulfilling individual desire or on an anaclitic engagement in altruistic love? A crucial conclusion of the following writing is that, whilst focusing on an artist's apparent desires is necessarily assumptive and reductive, an identification and discussion of 'super-egoic injunctions' does not need to lead to crudely diagnosing whether an artist is following them or not. This is because 'super-egoic injunctions' originate not in an inner psyche of an artist, but, as Freud implies and Lacan clarifies, as an outside agency that is partially internalized by the subject.⁸⁹ Žižek usefully defines this super-ego as the 'vengeful, sadistic, punishing aspect' of the agency whose 'gaze we try to impress, the big Other who watches over me and impels me to give my best'.⁹⁰ Following this, I have an interest in the way super-egoic injunctions emerge through the various writings on the social turn (including Bishop's).

Oedipus and Ego-Ideals

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud proposes the idea that, when psychoanalytically interpreted, dreams reveal themselves as the 'fulfillment of

⁸⁹ Freud, 'Civilisation', p. 142; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 1 Freud's Papers on Technique: 1953-1954*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 89-106.

⁹⁰ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 80.

wishes'.⁹¹ As discussed above in reference to the 'pleasure principle', the term 'wish-fulfillments' refers to the meeting of certain desires that are inhibited or denied in our conscious lives. It is because of this deniability, by our consciousness and the social rules that structure it, that the wishes fulfilled in dreams are rarely clearly definable. They are encrypted through metaphor, allusion, diversion, stand-ins and a plethora of other cryptic and absurd methods of what Freud terms 'distortion'.⁹² This distortion is, for Freud, a kind of psychic censorship, in which unconscious desires are revealed to us in a similar manner to a 'political writer who has unpleasant truths to tell those in power'.⁹³ In fear of suppression and censorship, the writer 'moderates and disguises the expression of his opinions'.⁹⁴

He finds himself compelled, in accordance with the sensibilities of the censor, either to refrain altogether from certain forms of attack, or to express himself in allusions instead of by direct assertions; or he must conceal his objectionable statement in an apparently innocent disguise.⁹⁵

Freud's description of an internal 'censor', alluded to in this example from the 'external' world, serves as an early introduction to the 'part of the ego in which self-observation, self-criticism, and other reflective activities develop'.⁹⁶ As James Strachey points out, it is in his essay 'On Narcissism' that Freud develops this 'self observing' agency into the concept of the 'ego ideal', a

⁹¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume IV (1900): The Interpretation of Dreams (First Part)*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 122.

⁹² Freud, *Dreams*, pp. 45-69.

⁹³ Freud, *Dreams*, p. 52.

⁹⁴ Freud, *Dreams*, p. 53.

⁹⁵ Freud, *Dreams*, p. 53.

⁹⁶ Rycroft, p. 177.

concept that later became synonymous with the 'super ego'.⁹⁷ In a paragraph that links Bishop's reference to 'super-egoic injunctions' to sublimation, Freud writes:

As we have learnt, the formation of an ideal heightens the demands of the ego and is the most powerful factor favouring repression; sublimation is a way out, a way by which those demands can be met *without* involving repression.⁹⁸

This goes someway to clarifying Bishop's position, in which 'neighbourly love' is framed as an 'ideal' which represses the collaborative artist's desires. For Freud, as discussed, art is one method of avoiding the repressive demands of the super ego (here the 'ideal') through the sublimation of inhibited desires. In following Lacan's approach to desire, Bishop seems to push art towards confronting and breaking through the ego ideal's repressions, an act inevitably entwined with the concept of *jouissance*. The inevitable suffering that accompanies the pleasures of *jouissance* means this is by no means an easy request to follow, as exemplified in Lacan's rhetorical question: 'Who is there who in the name of pleasure doesn't start to weaken when the first half-serious step is taken toward *jouissance*?'⁹⁹ I will focus more on the Lacanian approaches to desire that both support and complicate Bishop's position below. First it is worthwhile continuing to map out the emergence of the concept of the super-ego. This is in order to introduce the Lacanian concepts of the big Other and the Symbolic Order, which can be traced back to Freud's concept of the super-ego. They are important concepts in the development of

⁹⁷ James Strachey in Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 70.

⁹⁸ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 95.

⁹⁹ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 185.

my argument through the rest of the thesis, and are implicitly referenced in Bishop's opinion on collaborative art.

In the 1923 paper 'The Ego and the Id' Freud outlines his hypothesis of the origin of the super-ego.¹⁰⁰ The formation of the super-ego is directly related to the Oedipus Complex.¹⁰¹ Whilst the child develops a strong emotional dependence on the mother, through his or her desire for the breast, the relationship to the father is based more on becoming like him, by introjecting him.¹⁰² This introjection 'confronts the other contents of the ego as an ego ideal or super-ego' (at this point, Freud tends to use the terms ego ideal and super-ego interchangeably).¹⁰³ At first the child identifies fully with the father in order to get closer to the mother. However, this is complicated when the Oedipus Complex develops, Freud's theory of 'the fate of all of us, perhaps' in which we 'direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father'.¹⁰⁴ The demand, from our father, to leave our mothers alone is, for Freud, the first injunction which sets us up for a lifetime of rules, laws, restrictions and demands entwined in the guilty conscience that makes up the super-ego. Thus, from this point onwards, the ego becomes the recipient of tyrannical, double-binding demands, rooted in the injunction that 'you *ought to be* like' your father but also 'you may not be' like your father (for example, you cannot have sex with

¹⁰⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIX (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 1-66 (p. 34).

¹⁰¹ Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', p. 31.

¹⁰² Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', pp. 31-32.

¹⁰³ Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Freud, *Dreams*, p. 262.

your mother).¹⁰⁵ Therefore the super-ego, as internalized parent, admired, feared and taken 'into ourselves', henceforth keeps us in check, dishing out guilt, keeping an eye on our desires and doing its best to maintain our 'higher natures'.¹⁰⁶ It is this mixture of guiding law and 'mindless', double-binding tyranny that connects with Jacques Lacan's description of the super-ego, as links to his concepts of the symbolic order and the big Other. He addresses these internalised demands and denials in his 1953-1954 seminar *Freud's Papers on Technique*, detailing the unsettling relationship between the super-ego and the Law.¹⁰⁷

The super-ego is an imperative. As is indicated by common sense and by the uses to which it is put, it is consonant with the register and the idea of the law, that is to say with the totality of the system of language, in so far it [sic] defines the situation of man as such, that is to say in so far as he is not just a biological individual. On the other hand, one should also emphasise, as a counter to this, its senseless, blind character, of pure imperativeness and simple tyranny.¹⁰⁸

Three important points can be gathered from this reworking of Freud's super-ego. The first is its aforementioned contradictory and tyrannical nature. Secondly, the super-ego is at 'one and the same time the law and its destruction'.¹⁰⁹ This simultaneous being/destroying of the law is entwined with its reduction to the traumatically unfinished injunction '*You must*', an example of the super-ego as 'speech deprived of all its meaning'.¹¹⁰ Finally, this reference to speech deprived of meaning, and the defining of the super-ego

¹⁰⁵ Freud, 'The Ego and the Id' (emphasis in original), p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', p. 36.

¹⁰⁷ Lacan, *Freud's Papers*, pp. 89-106.

¹⁰⁸ Lacan, *Freud's Papers*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁹ Lacan, *Freud's Papers*, p. 102.

¹¹⁰ Lacan, *Freud's Papers*, p. 102.

as an 'imperative', is related to the Lacanian theory that it is not located internally, in the ego, but in the symbolic plane of speech and language.

The Symbolic Order and the big Other

The 'Symbolic Order' is one of three 'intertangled levels' that constitute 'the reality of human beings'.¹¹¹ The other two are the Imaginary, and the Real. Žižek offers a useful, chess-related analogy when explaining this triad. For Žižek the Real is the 'entire complex set of contingent circumstances that affect the course of the game'.¹¹² This might include the 'intelligence of the players, the unpredictable intrusions that may disconcert one player or directly cut the game short'.¹¹³ The shapes and names of the individual pieces ('Knight', 'Pawn') make up the Imaginary dimension of the game; and the Symbolic refers to the 'rules one has to follow in order to play'.¹¹⁴ Hence, in the Symbolic Order a 'Pawn' or a 'Knight' is 'defined only by the moves this figure can make'.¹¹⁵

So, firstly, the Symbolic Order is a network of rules. Alan Sheridan, the translator of Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, describes the origins of the concept of the Symbolic in the theory of semiotics and the 'signifier':

¹¹¹ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 8.

¹¹² Žižek, p. 9.

¹¹³ Žižek, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Žižek, p. 8.

¹¹⁵ Žižek, p. 8.

The symbols referred to here are not icons, stylized figurations, but signifiers, in the sense developed by Saussure and Jakobson, extended into a generalized definition: differential elements, in themselves without meaning, which acquire value only in their mutual relations, and forming a closed order – the question is whether this order is or is not complete.¹¹⁶

The definition of these ‘Symbols’ as purely differential signifiers, all mutual relations and no definitions (no ‘signifieds’) returns us to the ‘*You Must*’ of Lacan’s super-ego. So, in reading Žižek’s and Sheridan’s definitions together it is clear that the Symbolic is both the realm of speech ‘without meaning’, but also the realm of rules, the ‘rules one has to follow to play the game’. For Lacan, the most important ‘game’ that the symbolic order structures and rules is subjectivity. As Sheridan explains, the symbolic ‘is the determining order of the subject, and its effects are radical: the subject, in Lacan’s sense, is himself an effect of the symbolic’.¹¹⁷ This is why it is the order most important to psychoanalysis: ‘Everything which is human has to be ordained within a universe constituted by the symbolic function’.¹¹⁸ Lacan explains this universal nature of the symbolic order, the fact that it always precedes us, by asking us to ‘Think about the origins of language’:

We imagine there must have been a time when people on this earth began to speak. So we admit of an emergence. But from the moment that the specific structure of this emergence is grasped, we find it absolutely impossible to speculate on what preceded it other than by symbols which were always applicable. What appears to be new thus

¹¹⁶ Alan Sheridan, in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 1981 ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan, 1981 ed. (New York and London: Norton, 1981), p. 279.

¹¹⁷ Sheridan, p. 279.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Sylvana Tomaselli, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 29.

always seems to extend itself indefinitely into perpetuity, prior to itself.¹¹⁹

This theory of a Symbolic Order, which always precedes us as individuals, through which our subjectivity emerges, and in which we find the rules of the game, is entwined with the concept of the 'big Other'.¹²⁰ It is through the concept of the 'big Other' that we return to the 'super-ego'. In fact, in some introductory books on Lacan and Žižek the terms are used interchangeably, or as different phrases for the same concept. For example in *Introducing Slavoj Žižek: A Graphic Guide*, Christopher Kul-Want and Piero state that 'Freud calls the big Other the super-ego'.¹²¹ It is worth noting here that, in referring to Lacan's crucial differentiation between the 'ideal ego', the ego-ideal and the super-ego, Žižek confuses matters by positioning the super-ego in relation to the 'Real' as opposed to the Symbolic, which is linked to the Ego-Ideal:

The underlying structuring principle of these three terms is clearly Lacan's triad Imaginary-Symbolic-Real: ideal ego is imaginary, what Lacan calls the 'small other', the idealized mirror-image of my ego; Ego-Ideal is symbolic, the point of my symbolic identification, the point in the big Other from which I observe (and judge) myself; the super-ego is real, the cruel and insatiable agency that bombards me with impossible demands and then mocks my botched attempts to meet them...¹²²

However, for now I will continue to address it in its connection with the symbolic order, a connection that I hope to have demonstrated is clearly definable in both Žižek's and Lacan's approaches to it, despite this digression

¹¹⁹ Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory*, p. 5.

¹²⁰ Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory*, pp. 235-247.

¹²¹ Christopher Kul-Want and Piero, *Introducing Slavoj Žižek: A Graphic Guide*, (London: Icon Books, 2011), p. 71.

¹²² Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 80.

to the contrary. Lacan, for example, discusses the super-ego, the Symbolic Order and the 'big Other' together in relation to speech:

We must distinguish two *others*, at least two – an other with a capital O, and an other with a small o, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the *Other*.¹²³

Here Lacan is differentiating between the *objet petit a* – the 'other with a small o' that Žižek connects to the 'imaginary' and the 'ideal ego', and the big Other, which relates to speech, the Law and the symbolic. Žižek goes some way to clarifying the relationship between the symbolic order, the big Other and speech in a paragraph which, whilst not entirely collapsing the two into the same meaning, begins with the statement 'The big Other operates at a symbolic level'.¹²⁴ He goes on to describe the 'complex set of rules and other kinds of presuppositions' that the Symbolic Order is composed of, and which are always present 'when we speak', but which we are not always aware of.¹²⁵ In fact, an awareness of these rules has the potential to break down speech, and consequently the social exchange it is part of. They include the grammatical rules, as well as the rules that make us understood within the context we are speaking, and the rules of politeness and appearances. It is the constant presence of this set of rules, against which we are constantly measure ourselves, that means that the big Other 'can be personified or reified in a single agent' (i.e. 'God'), or 'the Cause that involves me (Freedom, Communism, Nation) and for which I am ready to give my life'.¹²⁶ Whilst, in its

¹²³ Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory*, p. 236.

¹²⁴ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 9.

¹²⁵ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 9.

¹²⁶ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 9.

relation to the symbolic order, the big Other is omnipresent and pre-exists us, it is important to note that Žižek also describes it as ‘fragile, insubstantial, properly *virtual*, in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition. It exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists*’.¹²⁷ This idea is central to my critical approaches to Reactor’s participatory arts practice in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Super-ego, Civilisation, Neighbourly Love

The approach to a super-ego as big Other, that is as much projected ‘out-there’, intertwined with speech and the Law as it is introjected into our ego, has some basic relations to Freud’s discussion of the ‘cultural super-ego’ in the concluding pages of ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’.¹²⁸ It is here that Freud, in a kind of reverse of his use of the political writer and the censor thirty years previously, develops an ‘analogy between the process of civilization and the path of individual development’ in order to map out his theory of the latter.¹²⁹ For Freud cultural development ‘proceeds’ under the influence of a super-ego ‘evolved’ by the community. Thus, whilst for Freud the ‘cultural super-ego’ is ‘based on the impression left behind by great leaders’ it is clear that, in this concept, we have an early outline of a procession of culture under the influence of a big Other:

¹²⁷ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 9. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁸ Freud, ‘Civilization’, pp. 141-145.

¹²⁹ Freud, ‘Civilization’, p. 141.

The cultural super-ego has developed its ideals and set up its demands. Among the latter, those which deal with the relations of human beings to one another are comprised under the heading of ethics.¹³⁰

Here it might be claimed that it is the 'procession of culture' itself, the development of civilization, that acts as the big Other.

In returning to Bishop's prescription for collaborative art, I will now turn to Freud's assertion that the most recent of the 'cultural super-ego's' 'cultural commands' is to 'love one's neighbour as oneself.'¹³¹ This command comes about in order to rid ourselves of the 'greatest hindrance to civilization', described by Freud as 'the constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another'.¹³² Freud's encounter with this inclination, and the injunction which aims to overcome it, is his response to his suggestion that 'we must ask ourselves to what influence the development of civilization owes its origin, how it arose, and by what its course has been determined'.¹³³ In order to address this question Freud maps out a historical narrative (much of which originated in *Totem and Taboo*) that leads up to the emergence of the 'love thy neighbour' injunction.¹³⁴ I will now summarise this narrative. I am aware that this summary entails a shift in tone in which it might be misread as 'mocking' or a little sardonic. In his preface to the latest edition of *The Plague of Fantasies* Žižek refers to the 'ridicule' with which this

¹³⁰ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 142.

¹³¹ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 141.

¹³² Freud, 'Civilization', p. 142.

¹³³ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 98.

¹³⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XII (1913-1914), Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. ix-164; *Civilization*, p. 98.

narrative is often met.¹³⁵ He suggests that this ridicule is fair if the narrative is read as ‘a fact of the earliest history of humanity’, but suggests it should instead be approached as a ‘libidinal fact’, a fact of “psychic reality”, which accompanies, as an obscene shadow, ‘normal’ paternal authority, prospering in the dark underground of unconscious fantasies’.¹³⁶ For me, allowing for the apparent ridiculousness of some of the narratives that underlie psychoanalytic theory to be momentarily foregrounded is important. This is because of its potential to produce brief tremors in the authoritative positions of these theories in the development of critical responses, including my own, to participatory art and performances. This seems apt in a section that deals with the importance of the fragility of the big Other. In my pursuit of awkwardness, the apparent ridiculousness of these narratives is what makes psychoanalytic theory so appealing. In the chapters that follow it should become clear that my arguments emerge not from ridiculing theories, or artworks, but of taking ridiculousness seriously as a tool for provoking productively awkward relationships with authority and responsibility.

The emergence of the super-egoic injunction in Freud’s thinking is as follows: ‘Primitive’ people realized that they needed to work, and that it was easier to work together. Thus they lived as groups.¹³⁷ Men realized that they wanted sex all the time, and therefore they held on to their women. Women realised that in order to keep their children they had to stay with their men. This led to

¹³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* 2008 edn., (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. vii-viii.

¹³⁶ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. vii-viii.

¹³⁷ Freud, ‘Civilization’, p. 99.

family groups being formed.¹³⁸ The father ruled over the group, limiting the brothers' sexual pursuits and denying them access to their mother. This was, as explained, the original super-egoic injunction.¹³⁹ However, the brothers realized that if they ganged together they could kill their father. They did so and consequently created an inherent sense of guilt in mankind and an eternal introjection of this primordial father into the ego of everyone who is born after them.¹⁴⁰ This means that even though the father figure is dead we still are not allowed to go around having sex with whoever and whatever we like. This is primarily because the law and restrictions associated with the murdered father were re-disseminated by the brothers in order to ensure civilization was maintained. Thus, in the logic of this development of civilization, the problems to be avoided are the fact that sex causes exclusivity and therefore should be maintained within the family unit and that, in order to work and develop civilization, we need some of the energy we'd be using up having sex everywhere.¹⁴¹ Freud opines that if we could be happy only having sexual drives at home with our partners, and then just working innocently alongside strangers in the outside world, civilization would work and we would be content. However, because we fear that we will lose our partner we can't help but look at *everyone* as potential lovers.¹⁴² Thus in order to develop good working relationships with each other without completely denying love, we develop the concept of 'aim-inhibited love'.¹⁴³ This means love without sex. This is encouraged because love binds groups of people together more

¹³⁸ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 99.

¹³⁹ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 100-101.

¹⁴⁰ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 100-101.

¹⁴¹ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 108.

¹⁴² Freud, 'Civilization', p. 108.

¹⁴³ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 102.

intensively than the interest of work in common. The super-egoic injunction 'love thy neighbour' is the demand for us to practice this 'aim-inhibited love' universally (except, of course, towards our actual lovers, who also get the sex), and hence work well together to develop civilization without falling into the disruptive exclusivity of genital love.¹⁴⁴

Having mapped out the origin of this injunction, Freud quickly moves on to outlining various reasons why it is doomed to fail, why, in the words of Lacan, he was 'literally horrified by the idea of love of one's neighbour'.¹⁴⁵ The reasons for Freud's horror at these injunctions are, firstly, the idea that it is wrong to love everyone because 'my love is valued by all my own people as a sign of preferring them, and it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on a par with them'.¹⁴⁶ Things become a little more antagonistic when Freud suggests that if the commandment was 'Love thy neighbour as thy neighbour loves thee' then it would seem much fairer.¹⁴⁷ However, because my neighbour 'seems not to have the least trace of love for me' and is, in fact, 'likely to want to injure or jeer at me', it would make more sense for me to feel 'hostility and even hatred' towards him.¹⁴⁸ This leads to the grander and more troubling declaration of the 'element of truth behind all of this'.¹⁴⁹ This 'truth' is the commonly disavowed idea that 'men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is

¹⁴⁴ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 109.

¹⁴⁵ Lacan, *Ethics*, pp. 185-186.

¹⁴⁶ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 109-110.

¹⁴⁷ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 110.

¹⁴⁸ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 110.

¹⁴⁹ Freud, 'Civilization', p. 111.

to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness.¹⁵⁰ The final problem for Freud is that the more we deny ourselves this aggressiveness against our neighbour the stronger the aggressiveness of the super-egoic injunction to love him grows, as well as our sense of guilt for feeling aggressive in the first place.¹⁵¹ Unable to direct it at our neighbour, we turn our aggressiveness in on ourselves. This is why Žižek describes the super-ego as ‘the agency in whose eyes I am all the more guilty, the more I try to suppress my ‘sinful’ strivings and meet its demands’.¹⁵²

It is this concept of inherent and introjected aggressiveness that Lacan develops in his own writing on ‘Love of one’s neighbour’.¹⁵³ Lacan describes how the ‘presence of that fundamental evil which dwells within this neighbour’ reminds us that the same fundamental evil dwells within ourselves.¹⁵⁴ He furthers this reflection by asking ‘And what is more of a neighbour to me than this heart within which is that of my *jouissance* and which I daren’t go near?’¹⁵⁵ In asking this he connects the problems of loving one’s neighbour with the problems of desire in a way that begins to problematise Bishop’s position.

Desire

According to Rycroft ‘If there is one concept which can claim to be the very centre of Lacan’s thought, it is the concept of desire’.¹⁵⁶ He then goes on to

¹⁵⁰ Freud, ‘Civilization’, p. 111.

¹⁵¹ Freud, ‘Civilization’, p. 123.

¹⁵² Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 80.

¹⁵³ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 179-190.

¹⁵⁴ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁵ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁶ Rycroft, p. 37.

state that the aim of psychoanalysis is to 'lead the analysand to recognize the truth about his desire'.¹⁵⁷ Bishop draws on this, but in so doing, she risks substituting an art context for a clinical one. On top of this, a misreading that Bishop's prescription implies is one enwrapped in the theory of repression. This position in relation to 'repression' is given further clarification when Bishop goes on to say that following the injunction to 'love thy neighbor' 'involves a sacrificial stance: it is the politically correct position of doing what seems right in the eyes of others'.¹⁵⁸ The problem with this idea of the artist's desire repressed by do-gooder politics is firstly that, as we have seen above, the subject emerges through the big Other, and thus isn't a separate, private entity that needs saving from it. The second problem with Bishop's reading is to be found in the key statement that Lacan makes in relation to desire: 'it is qua Other that man desires'.¹⁵⁹ We desire to be the object of the other's desire, and our own desires are inevitably entwined with the desires others have of us.

As Sherry Turkle points out, for Lacan, 'even the infant's first desire for the mother signifies something beyond itself: it signifies the wish to be what the mother most desires'.¹⁶⁰ Žižek explains that 'desire is structured by the "decentred" big Other, the symbolic order: what I desire is predetermined by

¹⁵⁷ Rycroft, P. 37.

¹⁵⁸ Bishop in Roche.

¹⁵⁹ Jacques Lacan, 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire', in *Écrits: The First complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 671- 702 (p. 690).

¹⁶⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (London: Burnett Books, 1979), p. 55.

the big Other, the symbolic space within which I dwell'.¹⁶¹ Thus, through Lacan's later work, our desires are no longer framed as internal wishes that we need to express (in clinical analyses or collaborative art practices), but rather it is *through* language, as Rycroft points out, that these desires emerge: 'by articulating desire in speech, the analysand brings it into existence'.¹⁶² Tim Dean clarifies this reading of desire in his article on Lacan and queer theory.¹⁶³ He usefully outlines the crucial point, that for 'Lacan desire is no longer a psychological category, since it is an effect of language – that is, as unconscious'.¹⁶⁴ Thus, there is a danger that the strand of psychoanalysis that underlies Bishop's approach to collaborative art aligns with what Dean describes as the 'liberationist strand of psychoanalysis whose readings of Freud recommended freeing desire from social repression'.¹⁶⁵

This writing challenges Bishop's privileging of explicitly antagonistic practices in three ways. Firstly, it reminds us that there is always an implicit antagonism in any social encounter, and that, in fact, the more we push ourselves to love our neighbours the stronger the underlying antagonism becomes. In other words, as I suggested in my first chapter, so called 'feel good' practices might be a more appropriate place to look for a politics of antagonism than those practices which willfully pursue a negation of neighbourly love. Secondly Bishop's implicit use of the 'repressive' model of psychoanalysis, in which

¹⁶¹ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁶² Rycroft, p. 37.

¹⁶³ Tim Dean, 'Lacan and Queer theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 238-252 (p. 243).

¹⁶⁴ Dean, p. 243.

¹⁶⁵ Dean, p. 242.

society denies us our desires, misses Lacan's positioning of the emergence of the subject and his or her desires through the realm of the symbolic. Thirdly, it is easy to see that, even if many of the works that Bishop celebrates might allow for the artist to pursue his or her desires, the participants' desires are far less welcome. That is not to say that the artwork or artist 'represses' the participants' desires. However, it does suggest a domestication of the participants that leaves no room for the emergence of their own desires through the symbolic space of the project.

Conclusion

In Twite's reflections on her experience of *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding* she admits to wanting to 'externalise the experience'. She suggests that the academic work of 'finding some kind of artistic meaning' would enable this externalisation. Psychoanalytic readings of participatory performance might also serve as a means of escaping them. Performing such readings in the most clumsy and damaging way would shift the focus away from Twite's own role in her discomfort and onto Howell's psychopathology. Taking a sociological approach and framing the performance purely in relation to, for example, contemporary society's restriction of physical intimacy with strangers would 'externalise' the experience. I understand Twite's wish to retreat from an experience she finds awkward, but I also propose that one of the unique efficacies of participatory performance is to be found in the fact that we are not external to the action, or its 'meaning', but that we are directly caught up in it. Howells' performance offers the opportunity to experience the inter-relationality of desire, to reflect on the way in which our own desires

emerge in relation to the other. Part of my enjoyment of being bathed is related to my sense that Howells enjoys my enjoyment, and that my enjoyment plays an integral role in the performance I am part of. My enjoyment is not only a response to elements arranged by Howells to produce *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding*, it is one of those elements. Thus, for me the 'meaning' of the performance is to found through reflecting on the ways our own pleasures or displeasures in the performance emerge in response to those performed by Howells. As I stated at the beginning, Howells exuded the sense that he wanted to care for you. Psychoanalysis is not to be put to work here in order to ascertain Howells' 'real' desires, to hypothesise on the sociological or psychological causes of those desires, or to clarify whether Howells' actions are actually related to his desires at all, instead emerging through a duty to do good. Instead psychoanalysis provides a tool for thinking through the network of desires of a situation in which we are embedded without becoming external to that situation. In Chapter 4 I engage further with this idea of participatory performance and inter-relational desires by focusing on the unwavering, yet awkward pursuit and affirmation of desires in the performance practice of David Hoyle. Before that, in Chapter 3, I focus on the awkwardness experienced in my brief collaboration with art collective a.a.s. a.a.s' relationship with inter-relationality and desire is complicated by their recurring allegiance to the Bartleby-like ethical position of 'preferring not to'.

Chapter 3

Awkward Alliancing with a.a.s

In this chapter I critically reflect on my experience of collaborating with UK-based art group a.a.s on their project *Xe54* in Walsall, UK (4-16 January 2011). The core members of a.a.s have described themselves as ‘four, intense people (two men, two women) who make very demanding work’.¹ These four people are Stuart Tait, Ana Benlloch, Alex Marzeta and Vanessa Page. I was invited to join *Xe54* alongside Luke Ferris: my long-term collaborator in performance art duo ‘AuntyNazi’, and performance artist Calum F. Kerr.

The awkwardness I discuss in this chapter is related to the self-identified intensity of a.a.s, the demanding nature of their work, and their drifts, digressions, irresolution and general resistance to fixity. It was produced as a result of a.a.s’ practice of preferring ‘not to’, their immersion in deterritorialisation and what Tait describes as their existence as a ‘molecular collaboration’.² Therefore I describe these approaches below. However, I do not claim that a.a.s intended to cause awkwardness. The awkwardness produced through these approaches is contingent on the personalities of those involved, myself included, and on unfolding events. This distinguishes this chapter from those that follow, in which I focus on awkwardness as an

¹ Stuart Tait, ‘Molecular Collaboration’, in *A thousand lines of flight – Anarchist Network Conference*, Loughborough University, 3-5 September 2012 < <http://stuarttait.com/writing/molecularpaper/>> [accessed 5/12/2014].

² Tait, ‘Molecular Collaboration’.

efficacious tactic or strategy. Unlike a.a.s, David Hoyle (Chapter 4) and Reactor (Chapter 5) appear to intentionally pursue awkwardness.

My focus here on awkwardness as a contingent outcome allows me to elaborate and test the 'dyspraxic C/PPaR' (dyspraxic collaborator/performer-participation-as-research) methodology described in the introduction of this thesis. This is the first of three chapters in which I immerse myself in participatory art and performance projects in order to identify and experience moments in which difficulties are caused for participants and collaborators, in which interactivity is made hard to do, or interactions are hard to deal with, or in which relational encounters do not run smoothly. This relates to the dominant definition of awkwardness used in this thesis: 'causing difficulty; hard to do or deal with' or 'not smooth or graceful; ungainly'.³ A potential problem of this methodology lies in the risk that it will produce a series of reflections on situations that I have subjectively experienced as difficult, unsmooth or ungainly. There are, I admit, times in which my research and writing on a.a.s is engaged with this problematic approach, particular in my descriptions and theorisations of what Tait described as 'the extreme tensions' that arose as a result of 'differences in working practices and glitches in communication' between a.a.s and AuntyNazi.⁴

My dyspraxia can contribute to such 'glitches in communication' is also dyspraxic. Ferris is also dyspraxic. Reflecting on this engagement is important

³ 'Awkward', *Oxford Dictionaries* <
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/awkward>> [accessed 20 May 2011].

⁴ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

because it allows me to clearly distinguish this version of my dyspraxic C/PPaR methodology, in which the experience of awkwardness is potentially contingent upon my involvement, from that of the following chapters. The strategic and intentional nature of the awkwardness in Chapter 4 and 5 means I am not relying upon my subjective experience of awkwardness, but instead am attentive to the ways in which awkwardness has an integral role in the projects' strategies and aims.

In the main body of this chapter I provide a description of Xe54, offering insights into a.a.s' approach to collaboration, participation and social engagement. This is followed by a section that connects a.a.s' intense and demanding mode of being with theories of social and political resistance based on Herman Melville's short story 'Bartleby the Scrivener'.⁵ In my conclusion I re-iterate the role of this chapter in the thesis as a whole. This includes further reflection on the contingent nature of awkwardness in some of the situations and interactions I have discussed and clarification of the relation of a.a.s' participatory practice to that of David Hoyle (Chapter 4) and Reactor (Chapter 5).

a.a.s and Xe54

a.a.s' arts practice includes improvisational and noise-based music projects, sci-fi inspired installations, social interventions and relational projects, cultish rituals that reference sigilistic magick (magic based on symbols), and a

⁵ Hermann Melville, 'Bartleby the Scrivener' in *Billy Budd and Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1998) pp. 1-38.

'tangled web of internet sites'.⁶ During *Xe54* the group wrote their name as 'a.a.s', always using lower case letters. Therefore I follow this presentation of the title throughout my writing about them, as it is predominantly to this residency that I critically respond. The letters have been presented in various ways since they emerged in 2001, though always in the same order. In my footnotes I follow the presentation and punctuation used in the publication quoted from. At the time of writing it is written as AAS and they suggest that it should be pronounced as a word and not as three separate letters - like the word 'ass' but with an extended 'ah' sound at the beginning. At other times they have pronounced it by spelling out the letters. They say that the letters do not stand for anything, however as a.a.s was initiated by artists Ana Benlloch and Stuart Tait (in Birmingham in 2001), it could be assumed that it originally stood for 'Ana and Stuart'. Part of the reason for briefly dwelling on this simultaneously pernicky and slippery relationship with titling is because it provides an initial glimpse into the 'intense' and 'demanding' approach and mode of being that a.a.s identify with. Importantly, as evidenced in this case of the group's name and the multiplicity and scope of their practice, a key approach that is intensely demanded through a.a.s' practice is a resistance of fixity. *Xe54* acts as a clear example of this approach.

Xe54 was a two-week participatory art project that occurred as part of a.a.s' three-month residency at The New Art Gallery Walsall. The residency was called *The Cage*. *The Cage* and *Xe54* were part of a series of projects that are collected together under the meta-title *The Other Place*. *The Other Place*

⁶ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, 'Paranoid Androids', *Plan B* Issue 17 (Dec 2006), 95.

projects are participatory, collaborative, publically engaged and relational artworks in which a.a.s 'create openings to The Other Place: a collective space of thought or dreams, the space of the future or potential, as well as the collaborative process or assemblage that produces those ideas'.⁷ During Xe54, everything we did was loosely framed as an attempt to create an opening to 'The Other Place'.⁸ Whilst the referent of the term 'The Other Place' remained ambiguous, there was a sense that we were trying to reach somewhere outside of our current reality. It alluded to such science fiction concepts as portals to other dimensions and time travel, as well as esoteric ideas of transcending consciousness, attempting out-of-body experiences and striving towards the attainment of psychic abilities.

Xe54 involved a series of rituals, mini-performances, investigative and interventionist tasks, and activities inspired by the Situationists, such as Guy Debord's 'dérives':

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.⁹

These activities mainly took place in public spaces in Walsall, particular the town centre, but we also made extensive use of gallery and project spaces,

⁷ a.a.s, 'Other Place', *Projects* <http://aasgroup.net/projects/the-other-place/> [accessed 25th October 2012].

⁸ Throughout this chapter *The Other Place* (in italics) refers to the series of participatory projects, whereas 'The Other Place' (in single quotation marks) refers to the concept or space pursued in these projects.

⁹ Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', *Situationist International ANTHOLOGY*, revised and expanded version, ed. and tran. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 144-154 (p. 144).

the library, and backspaces of The New Art Gallery Walsall. This meant spending many days wondering around the town following whims, trying out micro-interventions, making insistent, but tenuous links between the objects, interactions, and images we experienced, and dwelling in derelict and underused spaces that we felt could expand or contribute to the project. We (a.a.s, collaborators, and participants) joined queues in shops before waving those behind us to go ahead of us for no reason, often whilst other participants took notes. We attempted to meticulously reconstruct incidental interactions with members of the public from memory, repeating them in the spaces in which they first occurred with the aim of getting them right or revealing something new. We rummaged through boxes of unwanted donations at the back of charity shops. We constructed 'kits' from items bought from Pound Shops, assembling them into apparatus for exorcisms, 'table top-rituals', 'catastrophe prevention' and 'bee rescues', and produced short instructional videos on how to assemble and use them. We were encouraged to engage in activities and methodologies that embraced serendipity and chance in order to create performance scores and trigger new threads of tasks and explorations.

Materials apt for absorption into the language and narrative of *Xe54* included our memories of conversations with shop keepers, gallery staff, and market-traders in Walsall city centre, text on billboard advertisements, automated instructions for how to safely alight from an escalator, and books in The New Art Gallery Walsall's library. It is important to note that a large part of the work of being in this project, whether as an employed collaborator or a participating

member of the public, was not only to engage in these drifting wanderings and partially formed activities, but to initiate, formalise, and facilitate new activities, rituals and performances. This amounted to a continual and relentless engagement in developing and reworking processes. Our activities never led to a product or staged performance, we drifted from one task to the next, sometimes leaving tasks half-way through or becoming absorbed for hours in working over a particular detail.

‘Extreme Tensions’

It was in the midst of the production, initiation and playing out of Xe54’s activities that the ‘extreme tensions between individuals’ that Tait identified occurred.¹⁰ It was primarily between a.a.s and AuntyNazi that these ‘extreme tensions’ arose, though Tait also describes how a.a.s’ ‘engagement with the gallery was judged as difficult’, citing the fact that one ‘Christian member of staff even resigned because we performed a cleansing ritual around the building’.¹¹

Ferris and I have worked together since 2003, making calamitous participatory performances together as ‘AuntyNazi’, experimenting with unstable modes of authority and totalitarianism. Our performances tend to last between 15 and 45 minutes and occur as either one-to-one consultations or partially improvised shows in the midst of a loosely organised cluster of

¹⁰ Tait, ‘Molecular Collaboration’.

¹¹ Tait, ‘Molecular Collaboration’.

audience members. The durational, public, and task-based elements of Xe54 all lay outside of AuntyNazi's usual practice. However, these aspects of the project were not the trigger of the tensions. The tensions between a.a.s and AuntyNazi were, in my experience, largely a result of differences in our approaches to collaboration and audience participation. These differences can be summarised as followed: AuntyNazi lampoon fascism, a.a.s embrace anarchy; AuntyNazi drag participants into performances and hold them there, a.a.s allow them to drift in and out of their own accord; AuntyNazi's methodology for collaborating with others is based on positioning themselves as the underdog, a.a.s refuse hierarchy and deny that they are in charge; AuntyNazi make scrambled shows that inevitably fall apart, a.a.s scramble (or 'deterritorialise' – see below) but do not make shows.

These differences led to a mode of awkwardness defined by Adam Kotsko as 'radical'.¹² As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, in his short book *Awkwardness* Kotsko approaches his subject through a discussion of the ways implicit rules are maintained, broken, ignored, or misunderstood. He identifies three different types of awkwardness: 'everyday awkwardness', 'radical awkwardness' and 'cultural awkwardness'. 'Everyday awkwardness' refers to the breaking of the 'unspoken norms of a community'.¹³ 'Cultural awkwardness' describes situations in which 'there seems to be a set of norms in force, but it feels somehow impossible to follow them or even fully know them'.¹⁴ 'Radical awkwardness' arises 'when there doesn't seem to be any

¹² Adam Kotsko, *Awkwardness* (Ropley: 0-Books, 2010), p. 7.

¹³ Kotsko, p. 6.

¹⁴ Kotsko, pp. 16-17.

norm governing a given situation at all'.¹⁵ a.a.s' commitment to instability and flux across their approaches to definition, titling, membership, collaboration, and tasks and activities in individual projects, can be aptly described as an avoidance, or undoing of governing norms. Kotsko suggests that dangerous reactions and antagonisms can arise in such scenarios through a struggle to establish norms.¹⁶ In *Xe54* the intensity of this struggle was no doubt related to AuntyNazi's reliance on 'norms', due to our approaches to collaboration and our subjective dispositions.

As mention, both Ferris and I are dyspraxic. Our dyspraxia can lead to difficulties with executive planning and in making relevant contributions in group situations. Dyspraxia plays an integral role in AuntyNazi's practice, particularly in terms of collaboration. This means that often the material we develop for performances emerges from misunderstandings and inappropriate responses to each other and to the rules and norms of the site and context in which we are working. This aligns our approach with Kotsko's description of 'everyday awkwardness', which arises through the breaking (and subsequent exposure) of unspoken rules.

Collaborating on a project like *Xe54* in which the idea of rules and norms are continually undermined and resisted challenges our methodology and causes us frustration and anxiety. Ironically, our practice of pursuing (or strategically embracing) the efficacious *everyday awkwardness* that our conditions trigger was a key factor in producing a *radical awkwardness*. A core argument of this

¹⁵ Kotsko, p. 7.

¹⁶ Kotsko, pp. 7-8.

thesis is that the efficacy of awkwardness lies partly in its relationship to the exposure of unspoken rules. In Chapter 1 I introduced the argument that awkwardness might also reveal that the rules we assume are guiding a project are in fact open to change in response to participants actions and interactions. Such practices would be ideal for Ferris and I to collaborate on, because we would attempt a dysfunctional following of the rules and then the project would adapt and change in response to those attempts. Neither of these arguments apply to Xe54's radical awkwardness because of its reliance on the explicit non-existence of such rules.

I have described these details and summarised the differing approaches of a.a.s and AuntyNazi in order to clarify that the awkwardness that Tait defines as 'extreme tension' was not an aim or strategy. It was a contingent result of specific situations, outcomes and personalities. It is important to note, therefore, that I do not claim that every participant or collaborator that experiences *The Other Place* projects would experience this awkwardness. Other collaborators with different approaches and modes of being would be able to work on an a.a.s project without instances of awkward tension. In this case, my dyspraxic C/PPaR approach could be deemed as flawed because it risks framing awkwardness as an inevitable and integral part of a participatory project, when it was in fact contingent on *my* participation. However, it is important to note that the awkwardness that did arise became a core part of the project. No attempt was made to contain or bypass it. As Tait observed the tensions that arose lead to 'new, anxious, work that was outside anything

either group usually produced'.¹⁷ In the next section I elaborate on the approach to collaboration that AuntyNazi found so difficult and provide a more detailed account of the 'extreme tensions' that I frame as 'awkward'. I do this is in order to revisit the non-intentionality of the resulting awkwardness, but also to support my suggestion that there is a heightened potential for awkwardness in a.a.s' *The Other Place* projects. It also allows me to address some of the important outcomes that a.a.s were aiming for.

a.a.s' Approach to Membership and Collaboration

As discussed, throughout Xe54 AuntyNazi experienced a.a.s' unsettled relationship with membership. Tait, Benlloch, Marzeta, and Page took care of administrative duties throughout the project and advised and guided those who got involved. However, we were informed that, at least for the duration of Xe54, we were to think of ourselves as members of a.a.s, as was anyone else who collaborated on or participated in the project. This was complicated due to an ongoing ambiguity around when we were 'in' the project and when we were outside of it. The boundaries of the project were not clearly framed by a space or a time. Consequently there was some confusion as to if and when those who were not core-members were part of a.a.s. This ambiguity was intensified by the fact that Ferris and I lived with Tait and Benlloch in their flat in Birmingham for the duration of the project. Everything we did during those two weeks could end up having an important role in the development of Xe54. Our awareness of this created a light sense of paranoia around our

¹⁷ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

daily interactions with each other. At first it was difficult to ascertain whether the tensions that arose between core and temporary members were part of the project, triggered intentionally in order to generate material, or genuine inter-personal frustrations. This meant that when we collated and built upon experiences and interactions in order to develop the project, we often had to check whether snappy outbursts or sulky silences were appropriate material to revisit.

This ambiguity and tension was linked to a.a.s dedicated commitment to the contingencies of participation and to a philosophy and politics of anarchy and flux. This is influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of 'molecularity'.¹⁸ Tait described 'molecular collaboration' in a paper he gave at the *A thousand lines of flight – Anarchist Network Conference* at Loughborough University in September 2012. Following Deleuze, Tait differentiates what he defines as 'molecular collaboration' from 'molarity', which refers to groups, 'such as trade unions' that are defined 'in terms of a theme, a style, an identity or a "program" that categorises, defines and delimits a group, so that it can be grasped in its entirety'.¹⁹ 'Molecular collaboration', on the other hand, incorporates overlaps, intersectionality and the privileging of 'becoming' over 'being'.²⁰ Tait furthers his descriptions of a.a.s' model of 'Molecular collaboration' through reference to the concept of the 'assemblage'.²¹ Again, his use of this term is rooted in the philosophy of

¹⁸ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

¹⁹ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

²⁰ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

²¹ Stuart Tait, 'Chapter Two: Assemblages', in 'Becoming Multiple: Collaboration in Contemporary Art Practice' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis,

Deleuze and Guattari. In the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of their philosophical project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to their theory of 'assemblages' in their explanation of why a book 'has neither object nor subject':²²

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movement, deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable.²³

For Deleuze and Guattari, to attribute the 'book to a subject' is to 'fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements'.²⁴ Thus Deleuze and Guattari refuse the idea of the book coming together under the auspice of being about one particular subject, or of referring to one particular object. It is a collection of assembled parts that function together, but can also function apart, which affect each other and produce new pathways and excesses when brought together, but which also exist as a multiplicity of individual entities. a.a.s' self-declared existence as an 'assemblage' suggests that they bring together individuals with the aim of producing something new or different when assembled, but which are not organised around a singular subject, or aiming to become a unified whole. This links to the concept of

Birmingham City University, 2009) <<http://stuarttait.com/writing/phd-thesis/chapter-2>> [accessed 14/12/2014].

²² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 5.

²³ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 4.

²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 4.

‘deterritorialisation’, which was first developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, the first book of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project.²⁵

a.a.s were not intending to cause awkwardness, but they were intending to deterritorialise. Tait defines ‘deterritorialisation’ as follows:

The term is often used together with the terms ‘territorialisation’ and/or ‘reterritorialisation’. While territorialising forces tend to compose, define and limit a territory, practice, or individual, deterritorialising forces ‘undo’ bonds, scramble a territory, or move beyond established limits. The two types of force are not opposed to each other but tend to operate in mutual flux.²⁶

Understanding a.a.s’ mode of collaboration through these concepts of ‘assemblage’ and ‘deterritorialisation’ sheds some light on the privileging of process and resistance to fixity in the project. The encounters and interaction prompted and facilitated in *Xe54* were not engaged in order to produce, but in order to undo, to perpetually ‘scramble’ the territories of the New Art Gallery Walsall and Walsall’s town centre, of *The Cage* and *Xe54*, and of a.a.s and their collaborators.

Significantly for this chapter, a.a.s have demonstrated an awareness of the potential awkwardness that could arise through this pursuit of deterritorialisation, especially in relation to membership and collaboration. However, they deny that this awkwardness as an intention. This is evident in a

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

²⁶ Stuart Tait, ‘Glossary’ in ‘Becoming Multiple: Collaboration in Contemporary Art Practice’ (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Birmingham City University, 2009) <<http://stuarttait.com/writing/phd-thesis/glossary>> [accessed 14/12/2014].

recent interview in which a.a.s (appearing as 'AAS') explain the way membership of the group functions:

Core membership of the group is relatively stable at the moment, but at various points in AAS's history the group stated that there were no members and that AAS was an imaginary art group. *This was not done in order to be awkward* or deceptive, but to attempt to explore the notion that the nature of collectivity depended on imagination and belief in the life of the collective.²⁷

This quote aligns aspects of a.a.s' practice with awkwardness, despite the group's definitive statement that this is not intended. The quote demonstrates that even though a.a.s' motivations revolve around deterritorialisation, they acknowledge the reasonable possibility that their methods could be interpreted and experienced as an awkward mode of being. In the next section I define this 'awkward mode of being' as a Bartleby-like ethics.

a.a.s' Practice of Preferring 'Not To'

As explained, during *Xe54* our activities never led to a product or staged performance, we drifted from one activity to the next, sometimes leaving tasks half-way through or becoming absorbed for hours in working over a particular detail. Also, despite the fact that it was a participatory project occurring primarily in public spaces, there was rarely any active drive towards getting others involved. We were occasionally joined by one or two friends who had travelled to Walsall, or by curious gallery visitors who had seen posters for

²⁷ AAS, 'AAS' in Francesco Spampinato, *Come Together: The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015), pp. 16-19 (p. 16). Emphasis added.

The Cage project space and spoken with gallery staff. However, on more than one occasion rituals, interventions, and activities were performed solely by a.a.s, Auntynazi and Calum F. Kerr, often with little attention paid by or to those around us. During the project, as Auntynazi attempted to grasp the transitory processes that we were drawn into, a.a.s and ourselves playfully agreed that the group were like teenagers who wanted to stay in their rooms producing and listening to noise music, but who had been forced to make participatory art.

A little research into the titles of various *The Other Place* projects reinforces the idea that a.a.s wilfully engage in this contradictory approach to participation and social engagement. 'Xe54' is the chemical symbol for Xenon. Xenon is a colourless, odourless gas that is 'very unreactive'.²⁸ Its name is derived from the Greek word 'xenos', which means 'stranger'.²⁹ It was one of twelve projects that are collected together under the title *The Other Place*. Two other *The Other Place* projects have chemical symbols as titles: KR-36 (2007) and DY-66 (2007). 'KR-36' is the chemical symbol for Krypton, which, like Xenon, is a colourless and odourless gas that is unreactive (it only reacts with fluorine gas).³⁰ Its name derives from the Greek 'kryptos', which means 'hidden'.³¹ 'DY-66' is Dysprosium: a 'bright, silvery metallic element'.³² Its

²⁸ Royal Society of Chemistry, 'Xenon', *Periodic Table* <<http://www.rsc.org/periodic-table/element/54/xenon>> [accessed 11th October 2014].

²⁹ 'Xenon'.

³⁰ Royal Society of Chemistry, 'Krypton', *Periodic Table* <<http://www.rsc.org/periodic-table/element/36/krypton>> [accessed 10th December 2014].

³¹ 'Krypton'.

name derives from the Greek 'dysprositos', which means 'hard to get'.³³

Taken together these titles hint at a concealed acknowledgement of a.a.s' interest in producing participatory, publicly sited projects that are 'unreactive', 'hidden' and 'hard to get' and in which a.a.s maintain a position as 'strangers'. It is the combination of this interest in withdrawal and obfuscation with their engagement in a practice that is publically sited, participatory and unavoidably social that links a.a.s to the character of Bartleby and his particular mode of awkwardness. The previous chapter set up a psychoanalytical influenced approach to awkwardness and participatory performance based on the desire of the Other and the question "what do they want?". Here I argue that the questions that a.a.s' Bartleby-like ethics prompt are "why do they not want?" and "what do they want to not want?"

In Hermann Melville's short story *Bartleby the Scrivener*, the title character is hired as a scrivener to copy legal documents in a law firm.³⁴ The character begins to refuse to work. He goes on to refuse to leave the workplace, sleeping there, and then, when evicted and imprisoned he refuses to eat until he starves to death. Throughout he only ever offers the phrase 'I prefer not to' as an explanation for his refusal and inaction.³⁵ Through this Bartleby manages to simultaneously withdraw *and* remain disturbingly present. He does not wilfully leave any of the situations described. He 'prefers not to' leave just as vehemently as he 'prefers not to' take on any of the roles

³² Royal Society of Chemistry, 'Dysprosium', *Periodic Table* <http://www.rsc.org/periodic-table/element/66/dysprosium> [accessed 10^h December 2014].

³³ 'Dysprosium'.

³⁴ Melville.

³⁵ Melville.

assigned to him. Herein lies Bartleby's awkwardness. As Sianne Ngai states in *Ugly Feelings*, 'what seems intolerable about Bartleby is how paradoxically visible he makes his social invisibility'.³⁶ I would describe a.a.s' relationship to collaboration, to participation, and to social engagement as awkward and as an ethics similar to the ethics of Bartleby because, as outlined above, they embrace this paradox. They place themselves in the context of collaborative, participatory practice and in physical sites of public and social interactions and then withdraw from concrete, active and visibly productive engagements with those sites and contexts.

Both Slavoj Žižek and Gilles Deleuze have discussed the political potential of Bartleby's attitude in terms of opening up new spaces outside of the dominant social system. Deleuze writes:

If Bartleby had refused, he could be seen as a rebel or insurrectionary, and as such would have a social role. But the formula stymies all speech acts, and at the same time, it makes Bartleby a pure outsider [*exclu*] to whom no social position can be attributed.³⁷

Focussing on the phrase 'I prefer not to', Žižek observes that 'Bartleby does not negate the predicate; rather, he affirms a non-predicate: he does not say that he *doesn't want to do it*; he says that he *prefers (wants) not to do it*'.³⁸

Žižek goes on to ascertain that this is 'how we pass from the politics of

³⁶ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 332.

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, 'Bartleby; Or, The Formula', *Essays Critical and Clinical* Trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 68-90, (p. 73).

³⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 381-382 (*italics original*).

“resistance” or “protestation,” which parasitizes upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position *and* its negation’.³⁹ Bartleby’s status as ‘pure outsider’ (Deleuze) and his opening up of ‘new spaces’ (Žižek) is productively complicated when aligned with Ngai’s observation that he remains stubbornly present within the spaces he disturbs. Through this complication Bartleby emerges as a character who is able to stay within a situation whilst existing as ‘pure outsider’ and to create ‘new spaces’ that open up *within* the spaces in which he already resides. This seems a neat summary of the way a.a.s position themselves within the sites and contexts in which they are situated and of their construction/pursuit of new spaces through the concept of ‘The Other Place’. It relates to the argument for the efficacy of awkwardness that runs throughout this thesis.

This argument links to Kotsko’s suggestion that ‘awkwardness is a breakdown in our normal experience of social interaction while itself remaining irreducibly social’.⁴⁰ Thus awkwardness, like Bartleby and a.a.s, has the potential to create disturbances in social situations that simultaneously throw us outside of them *and* keep us in them. This creates space for us to critically examine those situations from the outside without having to leave them. The existence of such paradoxical opportunities for simultaneous involvement and reflection is, I argue, only discoverable through participation. The spaces that a.a.s’ open up, and which we reached via awkwardness in *Xe54*, are not available for those outside the project. This re-confirms the importance of my C/PPaR methodology.

³⁹ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, pp. 381-382. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ Kotsko, p. 15.

Conclusion

The chapter has both elaborated and tested my dyspraxic C/PPAR methodology, addressing a situation in which the awkwardness that arose was, at least in part, contingent upon my involvement. Whilst a.a.s acknowledge the heightened potential of such awkwardness arising in response to their approaches, it is denied as an intention. a.a.s' motivations are rooted in a commitment to scrambling territories, opening up new spaces, and maintaining flows instead of producing clear outcomes. Importantly, these aims are each linked to an embracing of the contingencies of collaboration and participation. During the two-weeks of the project, all our interactions and their outcomes were framed as part of *Xe54*. This, of course, included the awkwardness that arose. Although it was not pursued, awkwardness became, in this case, an integral part of the project.

The importance of a.a.s' practice in relation to the arguments and methodology of this thesis lies in this response to awkwardness. My engagement with *Xe54* highlights a blind spot in the present discourse around the social turn in art and performance. The lack of critical approaches to the contingent awkwardness that must occasionally arise in any practice that foregrounds social interaction reinforces the idea that such awkwardness is, or should be, ignored, contained, or overcome. a.a.s allowed the awkwardness that arose in *Xe54* to become a core material of the project with a key role in its development and our pursuit of 'The Other Place'.

The second mode of awkwardness explored in this chapter is awkwardness as a mode of being. My dyspraxic C/PPaR methodology enabled a direct experience of a.a.s' Bartleby-like ethics, and of the affects, experiences and ambiguities it triggers. It is clear that a.a.s do not engage in Bartleby-like ethics in order to produce awkwardness. However, I argue that an ethics similar to the ethics of Bartleby can be defined as an awkward mode of being. Like dyspraxia, it intervenes in the smooth flow of social interaction, causing difficulties and being hard to deal with. In the opening paragraph of *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai asks whether we should read Bartleby's 'inertness' as 'part of a volitional strategy that anticipates styles of nonviolent political activism to come, or merely as a sign of what we now call depression?'⁴¹ Here Ngai identifies an ambiguity around whether Bartleby's extreme inaction demonstrates an intentionally disruptive tactic or a subjective disposition. This is an ambiguity that is familiar to me due to my experience of dyspraxia and its existence as a hidden disability. Aunty Nazi happily embrace this ambiguity, drawing participants into awkward situations in which they are unsure of the difference between carefully structured experiences of cognitive dissonance and the chaos that emerges from an inability to properly plan and manage interactivity.

There are two reasons for discussing this idea of an 'awkward mode of being' here. It is not to attempt to diagnose the mental health of core members of a.a.s from through their arts practice. In the previous chapter I outlined the problems and pitfalls of diagnosing an artist's subjective dispositions through

⁴¹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 1.

experience of their art. However, I do propose that the impact of awkwardness is often connected to the difficulty in framing it as either intentional or contingent, or aligning it with dysfunction or strategy. This becomes more relevant in chapters 4 and 5 in which experiences of awkwardness are related to participants' sense of responsibility, both in terms of ethics and in terms of the success of the performance they are part of.

The examples of awkwardness in these projects are implicitly framed as integral to the performances. I approach the ungainliness, difficulties and disruptions that arise in these projects as tactical and intentionally efficacious. However, I acknowledge the possibility that awkwardness might also emerge from an artist's, performer's or participant's capabilities being challenged or their dysfunctions being exposed. This ambiguity has, I argue, the potential to heighten the participants' sense of personal, ethical, and aesthetic responsibility. I discuss this length in the next chapter, which addresses the performance practice of anarchic post-drag performance artist David Hoyle

Chapter 4

David Hoyle's Awkward Affirmation, Abrupt Antagonism and 'Car-Crash' Conviviality

David Hoyle's creative career spans painting, installation, television, filmmaking and stage and screen acting, but he is most well known as an improvising performance artist who appears with an anarchically androgynous aesthetic on the UK's LGBTQ avant-garde cabaret scene. The first part of this chapter addresses this thread of Hoyle's practices. Avant-garde cabaret means, for Hoyle, the juxtaposition of jaunty songs and explicit performance art and humorously mocking exchanges with audience members that spill over into jarring and uncompromising political diatribes. It brings the avant-garde ideologies of the twentieth century, defined by Günter Berghaus as an 'opposition to the established canons of art [that] went hand in hand with a battle against the guardians of tradition and social propriety' into pub and club performance and entertainment.¹

Unlike the majority of artists and performers I discuss in this thesis, Hoyle's performances are rarely solely participatory. Participation often arises in line with the traditions of stand-up comedy and other forms of stage-based entertainment and cabaret, such as magic shows and stage hypnotism. Audience members are temporarily invited to cross the line between spectator and participant. They might be jovially mocked from the stage or coerced into conversations that contribute material to improvised shows. Individuals might

¹ Günter Berghaus, 'Avant Garde', 'A-F', *Performance Research* 11:3 (2006): 14-16

choose to cross that line themselves, heckling from their position in the audience. Following a similar rationale for my engagement with *Outside In* in Chapter 1, based on fracturing the boundaries between relational artwork and participatory performance, I frame Hoyle's practice within the context of the social turn in art and performance.

This chapter discusses Hoyle's approach to the ethics of participatory performance. In *Theatre & Ethics* Nicholas Ridout describes how ethical philosophy is rooted in the questions 'How shall I act?'² When a performance or artwork frames us as participants as opposed to spectators this ethical question is, I argue, foregrounded. When a participant leaves a participatory performance or artwork it is more likely that they will think through how they acted and how they might have acted differently than if they had been a spectator. In my experience of producing, performing and participating in participatory performance, post-performance conversations often involve speculation on what a participant might have done differently. It seems less likely that an individual reflecting on a theatre production that they have watched or an exhibition that they have viewed would reflect on how they might have acted differently during that performance or exhibition. This is because the invitation to act was not there in the first place. In participatory art and performance participants are often prompted to ask themselves if they did the right thing for the show, for the performer or artist, for other participants, and for themselves. This chapter discusses the ways in which Hoyle's practice foregrounds these questions.

² Nicholas Ridout, *Theatre & Ethics* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p.

I do this by critically engaging with Hoyle's awkward engagement with participation as affirmation. Participation is framed here as an invitation, or demand, for us to affirm an intertwined series of causes, actions, ideologies and lifestyles. Affirmation is defined as an act of agreeing with something and of perpetuating that thing through agreement. Such affirmation has, for philosopher Simon Critchley, a direct role in the structure of ethical experience.³ In his view, 'ethical experience begins with the experience of a demand to which I give my approval'.⁴ He goes on to claim that there can be 'no sense of the good (...) without an act of approval, affirmation or approbation'.⁵ This chapter looks at the experience of ethics that Hoyle provides. This experience is awkward because of Hoyle's practice of demanding that his audience affirms potentially destructive acts and awkward modes of being. These demands are entwined with his own unwavering affirmation of, and commitment to a complex and contradictory 'sense of the good'.

Awkwardness arises in the relationship between affirmation and responsibility – responsibility for each other, for the performers, and for the performance. The position of Hoyle's performances within the context of cabaret and entertainment foregrounds the latter of these: responsibility to the performance. Participants have responsibilities that are different, I would argue, from those involved in socialising whilst eating curry for Rirkrit Tiravanija or conversing in a meeting between sex workers and councillors for

³, Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London and New York: Verso, 2012). p. 14-15.

⁴ Critchley, p. 14.

⁵ Critchley, pp. 14-15.

WochenKlausur. There are not, in these relational and socially engaged scenarios the feedback loops of enjoyment between the entertainer and the entertained that one finds in club, cabaret, and theatre shows. Such 'loops' are identified and described by Erica Fische-Lichte, who observes the way performers ('actors' in her terms), 'perceive and, in turn respond' to the reactions of the audience:

In short, whatever the actors do elicits a response from the spectators, which impacts on the entire performance. In this sense, performances are generated and determined by a self-referential feedback-loop.⁶

Gareth White develops Fische-Lichte's observation as a means of opening out his own proposition that 'becoming an audience participant involves perceiving a horizon, and accepting a responsibility to act within that horizon'.⁷ Thus the 'self-referential loop' relates back to Critchley's own circuit of ethical demands and approval. My own focus is on the way in which, in Hoyle's performance practice, the 'horizon' of feedback loops of entertainment is triggered, and maintained awkwardly. This sense of awkwardness in turn spreads from circuits of pleasure and leisure in performance to the horizon of causes, ideologies and ethics that our actions and lifestyles (unwittingly) affirm.

My engagement with these themes involves critical analyses of Hoyle's camp sincerity, raucous pedagogy, unabashed self-exposure and radical

⁶ Erica Fische-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 38.

⁷ Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 163.

spontaneity. I expand these readings by engaging with the blurred layering of authority and unequivocalty with fragility and ambiguity that amount to Hoyle's awkward affirmation of awkwardness. In my experience, this awkwardness productively troubles attempts to capture succinctly the causes, acts, ideologies and ethics that he affirms, or to perform a straightforward reading of the words and actions that affirm them. I argue that despite the elusiveness and contradictory nature of the causes that Hoyle affirms, his commitment to them is disturbingly unwavering. I compare this position to that of Sophocle's *Antigone* due to Hoyle's seeming willingness to allow himself to be destroyed by such commitment.⁸

The two performances that I discuss here are *Lauren Harries Sober* (2008), performed at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern on 22 April and *David Hoyle's Factory: A sweatshop for the soul* (2011), performed at the Chelsea Theatre, London, on 12 and 13 November, as part of the 'Sacred' festival. I watched video documentation of *Lauren Harries Sober* and was in the audience on the second evening of *David Hoyle's Factory: A sweatshop for the soul*. I have been to many of Hoyle's shows throughout my PhD and have been cajoled into participation several times. The first of the moments of participation that I focus on, which occurred in *Lauren Harries Sober*, consisted of an audience member shouting "Don't be fucking mean" at Hoyle during his on-stage interview with Harries. The second, at the Chelsea Theatre, involved a comparatively docile and benevolent Hoyle being criticised by an audience member for not being angry enough and, consequently, not being funny

⁸ Sophocles, 'Antigone' in *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles, (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), pp. 55-128

enough. My reading of these moments emerges from the observation that Hoyle immerses his audiences in a hilarious and awkward menagerie of affirmation, allegiance, responsibility and complicity. In expanding my attention to a wider engagement with Hoyle's practice, I discuss what I see as his implicit request for a commitment to an on-going performance project and a series of fragmentary and occasionally contradictory causes. In summary, my interest is in how Hoyle manages to immerse himself and his audiences in awkwardly affirming awkwardness, by repeatedly performing and demonstrating the complexities and limitations of the subjects and causes affirmed.

The second part of this chapter focuses on two examples of Hoyle's film-work. I discuss the abrupt shifts in tone that undermine any easy categorisation of his practice as either convivial or antagonistic. I observe 'car-crash' moments in publically-engaged performances where seemingly convivial encounters with participants slipped into acerbic outbursts of vitriol, or where an unnerving trajectory towards outrage and provocation was overturned as Hoyle conjured a mood of ecstatic geniality. My interest lies in the initial agenda of these films, which appear to be an efficacious confrontation and engagement with a series of localized social issues (LGBTQ identities and consumerism), investigated through a participatory methodology (conversations with participants). Thus it exemplifies a strand of Hoyle's practice that, like the moments of audience participation in his cabaret performance practice, can be usefully framed as an intervention into the social turn in art and performance.

Divine David Hoyle

In 1986 Hoyle arrived in London (from Manchester) along with his anarchically transgender, acerbic and attention-grabbing alter ego 'The Divine David'. From this time until 2000 he developed a reputation for performances that would see him 'lacerating the shallowness of the gay scene and cutting up his own skin'.⁹ Although he reached a level of success which led to him having two television series on the UK's Channel 4, *The Divine David Heals*,¹⁰ and *The Divine David Presents*,¹¹ in 2000 he killed off his alter ego in a show at Streatham Ice-Rink entitled *The Divine David on-ice*. The title irreverently entwined references to Disney On Ice family shows, a method for keeping bodies or body-parts fresh, and the act of postponing something. After the performance Hoyle took a six-year hiatus from performance. He explains the reasons for this as follows:

I got on the ride and I ended up on the telly. I felt out of my depth. I became quite frightened and felt it was time to dare to live my life without the *raison d'être* of the previous ten years. I had to kill off The Divine David, who had given me so much but at an inestimable cost. I learned to live with deep trauma while bouncing on the trampoline of humour in stilettos.¹²

He now performs mildly less lacerating, anarchically transgender, acerbic and attention-grabbing shows under his own name. In a 2011 interview with

⁹ Paul Burston, 'David Hoyle stripped down', *Time Out London*, October 2010, <http://www.timeout.com/london/gay-lesbian/article/1658/david-hoyle-stripped-down> [accessed 12/01/2011].

¹⁰ *The Divine David Heals*, dir. by Bernadette O'Brien, pres. by David Hoyle and Jay Cloth (Allied Forces) [broadcast on Channel 4, 2000].

¹¹ *The Divine David Presents*, dir. by Lucian James, pres. by David Hoyle (World of Wonder) [broadcast on Channel 4, 1999].

¹² David Hoyle in Burston.

myself he implied that a further shift away from trauma and stilettos was approaching: 'I am fast approaching fifty and I just think, "I've enjoyed it, loved it, but I don't just want the rest of my life to be screaming and shouting and being drunk, you know what I mean, dressed in mini-skirts and that"'.¹³

Despite the span and longevity of Hoyle's practice, there is a scarcity of academic writing about his output. Three critics who have engaged with his work are Gavin Butt, Dominic Johnson, and Fintan Walsh. It is useful here to bring summaries of their approaches together to contextualise the experience Hoyle offers, which I will then develop in my analysis of audience interaction. Butt observes how Hoyle's performances are immersed in a tone he describes as a 'peculiar mix of camp and sincerity'.¹⁴ For Butt, there is a persistent foregrounding of playfulness, desire and irreverence that productively interferes with the sincerity and seriousness of Hoyle's outspoken politics. Butt identifies a striking example of this phenomenon in Hoyle's frequent castigation of 'his male spectators for aping oppressive forms of machismo with their gym-honed bodies, only to admit, in the next breath, his own desire to fuck them'.¹⁵ Through analysis of this tone, Butt celebrates how Hoyle works against the problematic, elitist posturing of earnestness and conviction that can be found in much mainstream politics and academia. Hoyle's fluxing and irreverent material and delivery is framed by Butt as a vital method of undermining the exclusivity (enveloped in issues of class) that art

¹³ David Hoyle, Interview with the Author, London, 03/08/2011.

¹⁴ Gavin Butt 'Just a camp laugh? David Hoyle's laden levity', in Gavin Butt and Irit Rogoff (eds) *Visual Culture as Seriousness* (London: Goldsmiths, University of London and Sternberg Press, 2013), pp. 39-60 (p. 44).

¹⁵ Butt, 'Just a camp laugh?', p. 50.

and scholarly worlds maintain. Thus, Butt's approach to Hoyle's performances, which informs my reading, describes the inclusive, democratising effect of this refusal of reverence.

In an article pitting Hoyle's spontaneity and radicality against dominant, normative forms of theatre and performance, Johnson neatly captures Hoyle's gender-queer aesthetic in the term 'a *maquillage* car-crash'.¹⁶ He also notes Hoyle's didactic attachment to resisting normativity and consumerism. Johnson observes how Hoyle drags his audience into collusion with this cause through an 'abrasive pedagogy, formulating this style as terroristic tactics to be launched against the shibboleths of both mainstream and minority cultures'.¹⁷ In *Theatre & Therapy* Walsh describes how Hoyle's performances are entangled, in a complex and raucous manner, with therapeutic formats and exchanges.¹⁸ Concentrating on *Dave's Drop-in Centre* (2009), a series of shows that also occurred at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Walsh, like Johnson, notes Hoyle's explicit openness about his own history of being subject to brutal, homophobic bullying as well as his unabashed challenges to the 'self-loathing, narcissism and complacency that Hoyle perceives among the gay community'.¹⁹ For Walsh, Hoyle's performance practice displays a 'marrying' of 'cabaret with Theatre of Cruelty' that, in the case of *Dave's Drop-in Centre*, 'transforms the social space of a

¹⁶ Dominic Johnson 'It *only hurts* because it's true: Recent live art and performance in the UK', *Western European Stages* 19(1), 9-14, (12). Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Johnson, 12.

¹⁸ Fintan Walsh *Theatre & Therapy*, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 66-69.

¹⁹ Walsh, p. 67.

London pub into a place where defences are dropped, if not bludgeoned, and you come away feeling all the better for it'.²⁰

Lauren Harries Sober

Lauren Harries Sober was the seventh of eleven weekly shows, collectively entitled *Magazine* (2008). This was the third and final run of Hoyle's *Magazine* performances (2006, 2007, 2008), in which each interlinked show addressed a different 'issue'. In the second series of *Magazine* performances (2007), Lauren Harries, a post-op male-to-female transsexual who was briefly famous as a young boy due his television appearances as an expert in antiques, was invited to contribute as an interviewee in Hoyle's *Antiques Roadshow* issue (2007). The degeneration of this previous interview into a drunken confrontation led to Harries being invited to return for the third series. The show opened with Hoyle dancing whimsically to Noel Coward's 'Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage', possibly chosen as a light poke at Harries' previous gin-soaked appearance.

Many of Hoyle's performances open with a similar song and dance routine, in which he points and smiles at members of the audience he recognises, takes on 'expressionist dance' poses, and shows off particularly compelling parts of his outfit (his long decorated nails in this instance). He often cuts off the record halfway through, saying, 'that's enough', and then shifts abruptly from a heavily stylised performance to a more pedestrian tone as he introduces the

²⁰ Walsh, p.68.

show. The audience were warned that things were going to get 'quite cerebral' and Lauren Harries was invited onstage as a 'beautiful human being'. After a friendly start, in which they laughed about their previous intoxicated altercation, an unsettling edge developed when Harries suggested that Hoyle should show his sensitive side more often. This led to a reference to the previous week's 'issue', *Arts Council* (15 April 2013), which included a short piece by guest performance artist Puta that involved onstage defecation. Harries described this act as 'disgusting' and it is at this point that the tone quickly shifted and a stream of increasingly unpleasant insults and accusations were exchanged. By 20 minutes into the performance, the audience had split into supporters of either Hoyle or Harries. Loud, supportive chanting of 'Lauren' disrupted the interview, alongside similar interventions on behalf of Hoyle.

These interventions from both factions of the audience continued to build, and included a moment in which a man declared that whilst he has 'adored' and 'respected' Hoyle 'for many years' he wants him to stop being 'mean'. Despite this intervention and the open vilification toward Hoyle from both Harries' followers and some of his own, the exchange of insults continued. Later, in an interview with Butt, Hoyle showed no sign of remorse, remaining insistent that Harries lacks humility, is reactionary and uninformed, and 'started it'.²¹ This defence made up part of a defiant stance in response to the refusal by many members of the audience to affirm Hoyle's words and actions:

²¹ Gavin Butt, 'Hoyle's humility', in *Dance Theatre Journal*, 23:1, 30-34, (31).

Being vilified by his own audience was, he says, a 'horrific feeling' but 'I also knew there was an integrity to it. If I wanted to maintain where I was coming from it wasn't going to be an easy ride for anybody, me included, because I was bringing elements of northern stand up, and northern brusque, and being very direct with the questions. But I did find it difficult.' He impresses upon me the importance of taking such risks, of even being prepared to lose his audience. 'I think it makes it livelier. When we're grown up and mature we realise that not everyone is going to like us. And that's OK.'²²

In the heckler's intervention we have an example of an audience member who has committed to the over-arching Hoylian 'project': 'adoring' and 'respecting' Hoyle for many years but refusing to act affirmatively towards Hoyle's actions and words that evening. Hoyle rejects any need for this affirmation, wilfully risking an unpopularity that could, in turn, compromise the continuation of his practice.

It is this rejection that connects the ethics of Hoyle's performance practice to Jacques Lacan's reading of *Antigone*.²³ Antigone never gives up on her desire to bury her brother within the walls of Thebes, despite Creon's ruling against it and the certainty that this act will lead to her banishment and death. Her commitment is totally unwavering, and even her own sister believes she is going too far. For Lacan the act of going to far, pursuing a desire that is in conflict with laws that are 'acknowledged by the community' to be 'just', is an ethical act.²⁴ Antigone not only accepts actual death as a consequence of her pursuit, but also a symbolic death.

²² Butt, 'Hoyle's humility', 32-33.

²³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 243-287.

²⁴ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 243.

In my chapter on psychoanalysis I discussed Lacan's concept of the symbolic order and the 'big Other', describing them as structures through which our subjectivity emerges. The big Other constitutes a Law that we cannot go beyond without sacrificing our position within the symbolic order and consequently isolating ourselves to the point of destroying our existence as a subject. Doing so constitutes a breakthrough to the register of the 'Real', the traumatic, unreachable dimension which 'resists symbolization completely'.²⁵ For Lacan this is a heroically tragic ethical act. He writes that 'tragic heroes are always isolated, they are always beyond established limits, always in an exposed position and, as a result, separated in one way or another from the structure'.²⁶ Hoyle emerges as a tragic hero in the Lacanian sense due to his own willingness to isolate himself from his audiences and wilfully risk death, if not physically, then of his existence as a performance artist.

However, despite Hoyle's extreme commitment to a cause, demonstrated through a willingness to risk his livelihood for it, the cause itself is difficult to pin down and emerges as fragmented and unfixed. The contradictory and unfixed nature of the causes Hoyle affirms is exemplified in his interview with Butt. On the one hand Hoyle articulates his commitment to humility and tolerance and his aggressive stance against the superiority, conservatism, and judgementalism he observed in Harries' comments and attitude.²⁷ On the other hand, there is a dedication to brashness (attributed to being from the

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 1 Freud's Papers on Technique*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.66.

²⁶ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 271.

²⁷ Butt, 'Hoyle's humility', 32-33.

north of England), liveliness and keeping things 'real' that leads to an unabashed positioning of racist English comedian Bernard Manning as 'the greatest avant garde artist that there is'.²⁸ There is also Hoyle's insistence that he should betray his own 'ignorance and prejudice' instead of being 'PC'ed up to the eyeballs'.²⁹ Butt concludes his article by summarising and celebrating these ideological flips and turns as part of the 'glorious and unpredictable performances of contradictions'.³⁰ For me, the potential glory lies in the way Hoyle indulges in, and offers up, the satisfaction and security of commitment and affirmation without the need for a problematically totalising and unobtainably infallible cause to commit to and affirm. Hoyle repeatedly affirms, and invites his audience to affirm, the act of being awkward. It is to this awkwardness that Hoyle makes an Antigonian commitment, and that acts, to use Critchley's terms, as the demand that audiences and participants are caught up in approving.

David Hoyle's Factory: A Sweatshop for the Soul

David Hoyle's Factory: A Sweatshop for the Soul presented its audience with a collision of trade union slogans and rhetoric with the artsy decadence and glitter of a 1960s studio party. As I entered the bar area of the Chelsea Theatre a man asked if I would be 'joining the union?' I replied 'yes', and was relieved I had done so when I saw that all the seating was labelled 'reserved for union members'. A woman, costumed between 1960s New York glamour

²⁸ Butt, 'Hoyle's humility', 34.

²⁹ Butt, 'Hoyle's humility', 31.

³⁰ Butt, 'Hoyle's humility', 34.

and kinky science laboratory assistant, invited us to a long table in order to begin our interactive experience by doing some colouring in. Whilst we could choose the colours, design and type of pen we used to engage in this activity, all the images to be decorated were identical - an outline of Hoyle's face reminiscent of the black and white images in Andy Warhol's silkscreen painting *Marilyn Diptych* (1962). There was, for me, the sense that the interactivity of this event was indulging a degree of mockery, possibly at the expense of the feel-good ethics and aesthetics of other contemporary, participatory performances. The dynamic was one of an awkwardly autocratic conviviality, in which an irreverent yet triumphantly rousing performance tone was layered with a deceptive, bait-and-switch attitude towards audience interaction and communal, relational activities. Instead of Hoyle's usual acerbic and abrasive outbursts, the uneasiness of this performance seemed to emerge more from his desire 'to promise things and not deliver'.³¹ In this show, the things Hoyle promised beforehand, in an interview with Paul Burston, were 'creative participation', 'communal work', and 'immortality'.³² Hoyle's delivery on these promises was partial, generating a humorous and awkward contradiction between the causes affirmed in his words and the experience that the performance offered. This contradiction is captured in the moment of audience interaction that I describe below.

Having completed my colouring in and had my picture displayed amongst everyone else's at the back of the stage, I took my seat as Hoyle and his

³¹ Hoyle, quoted in Butt, 'Just a camp laugh?', p. 51.

³² Paul Burston, 'David Hoyle Stripped Down', *TimeOut*, 29 October, 2010 <<http://www.timeout.com/london/lgbt/david-hoyle-stripped-down>>, [accessed 5 December 2013].

musicians entered. The rest of the show consisted of a friendlier version of the improvisatory avant-garde cabaret that Hoyle is known for. The interactions with audience members were gentler than the criticisms and insults that I have witnessed at the RVT. In Butt's reference to these merrier performances, he describes how fans 'remark upon the change of tone from one show to another. Sometimes audience members after a particular performance say that he [Hoyle] was in a good, cheery mood, explaining perhaps an unusually "light" show'.³³ Whilst this suggests a positive response to Hoyle's intermittent cheeriness, linked to Hoyle's canny ability to maintain unexpectedness on a show-by-show basis, in the midst of this particular 'light' show an audience member reacted by shouting out that Hoyle should "get angry". In her opinion, this was because he was "funnier when he was angry". Hoyle's response maintained the good feeling as he described his current good health, his love for all present and his refusal to pretend. Unlike the moments I discuss in the second part of this chapter, he did not allow the performance to slip from conviviality to antagonism.

This performance, and its moment of audience interjection, relates to my analysis of affirmation and commitment in several ways. Despite its apparent cheeriness, the performance still resisted easy acquiescence to audience affirmation. Hoyle maintains the risks of turning his audience against him. Whilst this is partly due to his bait-and-switch relationship to the communal creativity he promised, it is also embroiled in his refusal, this time, to play the 'pantomime villain'. Instead of performing as the entertaining baddie he rejects

³³ Butt, 'Just a camp laugh?', p. 56.

a pursuit of approval by staying true to his less-titillating good mood. He resists the opportunism of reducing himself to a constructed character, ready to be summoned up for boos, hisses, thrills and hilarity and maintains a fidelity to an elusive cause that is dominated by a pursuit of integrity.

Commitment and Responsibility

Hoyle's explicit reference to his "good health" in response to the heckler's demand for anger reminds those who encourage and affirm his performance practice of the potential irresponsibility of that affirmation. The implication is that, if cheeriness and lightness emerge from Hoyle being in good health, then his wilder, angrier and potentially more exhilarating performances might rely on, perpetuate, or even trigger a harmful and destructive state of health. Hoyle frequently and explicitly reminds audiences of the possible connection between his most reckless, radical and hilarious acts and words, and his battles with mental health problems, alcoholism and a traumatic past. As discussed, he also, in performances such as *Lauren Harries Sober*, continues with a perceived destructive behavior, despite the clear indication by many in the audience that they refuse to affirm it. This has the potential to intervene into any sense of responsibility an audience has for Hoyle or the success of his performances. Again, Hoyle confronts his audience with an unclear overlap of affirmation, justification and responsibility. However, despite this occasional sense of ambivalence around the level of complicity we have in Hoyle's performances, there are occasions when we cannot escape our role in perpetuating shows that contain, or even rely on, (self-) destructive

activities. Importantly, this is not just the case with our affirmative acts within individual performances but also in our response to the appeal to a long-term fidelity to Hoyle and his practice. This appeal is most clearly exemplified in the structuring of some of his performances into blocks of weekly shows. For example, the positioning of *Lauren Harries Sober* as a kind of sequel, with a titular in-joke for those who were present at *Antiques Roadshow*, implies a reward for those committed to returning to Hoyle and his performances. Such commitment is, in turn, an act of affirmation.

A continued return to Hoyle's shows implies a statement of "yes, keep going". This is important in a practice that persistently embraces the risk of mayhem and mishap, resulting not only in the provision of guiltily titillating spectacles, but also occasionally falling into potentially tedious displays of awkward mishaps and trite unpleasantness. Such moments have ranged from Hoyle, in his previous incarnation as 'The Divine David', 'injecting mysterious substances onstage' to an alcohol-influenced demonstration of 'less-than-perfect race politics'.³⁴

My aim in addressing these activities is not to moralise on Hoyle's performances or audience reactions to them, nor to presume what makes a healthy or destructive activity for Hoyle (I address such psychopathologising approaches in the next chapter). Instead, I argue that there are onstage moments (for example, injecting 'unknown substances') that confront

³⁴ David Hoyle in Rupert Smith, *Face to Face: An interview with David Hoyle*, by Rupert Smith, Homotopia TV, Unity Theatre Liverpool, 10 November 2011, <http://vimeo.com/32191999>, [accessed 10 September 2013]; Butt, 'Just a camp laugh?', p. 50.

audiences with an immanent and complex sense of responsibility in relation to their decision to act affirmatively when responding. This sense of uneasiness around affirmation connects with the neologism 'response-ability'. The term appears at the end of Hans-Thies Lehman's *Postdramatic Theatre*.³⁵ Lehman refers to the 'mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images'.³⁶ Rachel Zerihan develops the term in accordance with her discussion of the intimate encounters of performances involving one performer and one participant/ audience member.³⁷ For her, it is a committed response in a format in which 'questions around one's individual role in the performance's agency - in terms of cultural politics, erotic encounters, sacred moments, therapeutic interactions and risky opportunities - are brought to the foreground'.³⁸

In my reading of Hoyle's practice 'response-ability' refers, firstly, to the way he confronts his audience with their conflicted responsibilities in perpetuating, on the one hand, potentially destructive words and actions, and on the other, a hysterically funny and affirmative individual show and ongoing performance practice. Hoyle has the potential to immerse audiences in uneasiness about their ability to respond appropriately both in their role as ethical subjects and as audience members contributing to the success of a show. In his interview with Hoyle, author Rupert Smith captures this conflicted sense of

³⁵ Hans-Thies Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 185-186.

³⁶ Lehman, p. 186. Emphasis original.

³⁷ Lehman, p. 186. Emphasis original.

³⁸ Zerihan, 3.

responsibility in relation to acting affirmatively in response to moments that are simultaneously upsetting and funny:

I sometimes think that your work must be an intolerable burden. Because you go out onto that stage and you do things that make me feel, as a friend of yours, quite upset sometimes, even though I'm laughing so much that my face hurts. But I've actually seen you do things that really upset me.³⁹ (2011)

By confronting audiences with the predicaments inherent in acts of affirmation (for example, laughing whilst finding something upsetting), the social space that Hoyle commands emerges as a microcosm of our lives outside of it. Across both we are burdened by the 'intolerable burden' of others, thus undermining our ability to affirm fully the projects we involve ourselves in.

The unwelcome nature of this burden links to what R. Jay Wallace describes as a 'bourgeois predicament', in which affirmation of certain projects that we have come to build our lives around 'arguably commits us to affirming the social inequalities that are their historical and contemporary conditions, even though we continue to view those inequalities as objectively lamentable'.⁴⁰ Wallace gives the example of 'academic pursuits that are carried out in the context of elite research universities, which would not be possible in a social world that did not involve massive deprivation and inequality in human life prospects'.⁴¹ Hoyle's acerbic pedagogy is played out against the narcissistic, complacent and consumerist 'projects' that are, for him, affirmed through

³⁹ Smith.

⁴⁰ R. Jay Wallace, *The View From Here: On affirmation, attachment and the limits of regret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 7.

⁴¹ Wallace, p. 7.

some elements of contemporary gay culture. Hoyle's position in the face of such projects is captured in his rants against 'the homogenized gay world, which doesn't like to acknowledge that some gay people are homeless and penniless, and which likes to pretend that collectively we don't have any responsibility for anybody'.⁴²

Hoyle's attacks are not only targeted towards conservative and consumerist elements in 'gay culture'. For example, as a dad I have felt awkwardly self-conscious when hearing Hoyle's definitive and graphic disapproval of human reproduction. At various performances I have sat with my rucksack full of nappies and rusk crumbs whilst Hoyle raged against the idea of having children when there are so many wars that need to be stopped. I was brutally reminded of the intensely inward looking duties of the parenthood 'project' that has become central to my life and its potential to perpetuate an oppressive heteronormative ideal and divert attention away from my responsibilities in overcoming global inequality and violence. Thus I experienced Hoyle's foregrounding of what Wallace describes as the 'affirmation dynamic', which 'leads to a rift between ourselves and the larger world in which we live, one that frustrates our ambition to live lives that are worthy of unconditional affirmation'.⁴³ Whether these projects involve immersing ourselves in hilarity on an evening out, or building lifelong responsibilities, lifestyles, careers and other attachments that affirm our subjectivity, Hoyle productively infects such affirmation with a sense of response-ability and awkwardness.

⁴² David Hoyle quoted in Johnson, 12.

⁴³ Wallace, p. 7.

Affirming Awkward Affirmation

Hoyle's acts and words of affirmation are performed with Butt's 'camp and queer sincerity' and an unsteady didacticism that embraces fragility and contradiction.⁴⁴ This does not take away from the commitment Hoyle makes to the causes he affirms, as demonstrated in his willingness to risk an unpopularity that might compromise his livelihood as a performer. Instead it offers up the awkward pleasures of affirmation whilst refusing to ignore the potential exclusivity and ignorance it relies on. On top of this, despite his inclusive, irreverent and infectious performance of unwavering affirmation, the actual causes that Hoyle affirms are difficult to ascertain. The most easily graspable, but by no means definitive elements of this multi-faceted, precariously layered accumulation of causes, is a rampant and addictive drive towards living 'experientially',⁴⁵ an ecstatic celebration of the marginalised and the excluded, and a ceaseless rage against the oppressively normative and the damagingly judgemental. However, recklessly pursuing new experiences does not always support the attentive care for others that Hoyle's other causes require. On top of this, as exemplified above, is the commitment to the elusive and unfixed act of pursuing integrity, or doing what feels right in the moment, which has the potential to undermine spontaneously any other ideal that Hoyle's projects aim to affirm.

Lauren Harries Sober is a prime example of how Hoyle embraces the disorder that occurs when multiple causes seem to vie for his affirmation. The

⁴⁴ Butt, 'Just a camp laugh?', p. 44.

⁴⁵ Hoyle in Smith.

presence of Harries herself contributed to the tension and trouble of this disorder, due to her position both as a marginalised identity at the receiving end of brutal judgements and, for Hoyle, as an individual willing to judge others dismissively from a perceived position of superiority. A peculiar affirmation emerges from these vying pursuits of integrity, care and anti-judgementalism. Ultimately, this is an affirmation of the ambiguities, fragments and contradictions that arise through the impossibility of any project or cause to be totally stable and uncompromised. In my case, this means that even though I experienced discomfort when acting affirmatively (laughing, clapping, nodding) in response to Hoyle's vicious attacks on reproduction, the position of contradiction and even betrayal that I found myself in felt accommodated.

It is this committed relationship to contradiction that distinguishes Hoyle's ethical position from that which Claire Bishop demands of socially engaged artists. Bishop is referring to Antigonian ethics when she suggests that 'the best socially collaborative art does not derive from a super-egoic injunction to "love thy neighbour," but from the position of "do not give up on your desire"'.⁴⁶ I critiqued Bishop's position in Chapter 2, by pointing out that it relies on two problematic approaches to psychoanalysis. The first is the assumption that a critic can access an artist's desires through experience of their artwork. The second is the framing of desire as something that is hindered and disciplined by the big Other, instead of, following Lacan,

⁴⁶ Bishop in Jennifer Roche, 'Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop', *Community Arts Network* <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/07/socially_engage.php> [accessed 02/10/2010]

something that emerges through our relationship with the big Other.⁴⁷ The seemingly impenetrable and contradictory nature of the causes Hoyle commits to with such ferocity is important here. Like Antigone, Hoyle's ruthless defiance is not reducible to a pursuit of a personal desire over affirmation by the community. Antigone insists that Creon's ruling is against the gods, and her sacrifice is for a greater cause than the 'good' that Creon seeks for Thebians.⁴⁸ However, the impact of Antigone's defiance lies in the impenetrability of her motivations. For Slavoj Žižek Antigone's sacrifice affirms an ambiguous, and 'unconditional' demand.⁴⁹ In doing so she emerges as a key example in his understanding of the experience of subjectivity 'being infinitely indebted and responsible to the call of an Otherness which never acquires positive features, but always remains withdrawn, the trace of its own absence'.⁵⁰

Approached in this way Hoyle's own unpredictable and contradictory relationship with affirmation in his audiences begins to appear as a consequence of his own affirmation of an absent, withdrawn, uncontainable 'call'. This connects Hoyle to Antigone's relationship to the Lacanian Real. Hoyle's ethics pushes himself and his audience towards a register of uncontainable and contradictory orders and causes in which subjectivity becomes unfixed and fragmented. This returns us to the observation, stated

⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Karnac, 1977), p. 235.

⁴⁸ Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 258.

⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 22.

⁵⁰ Žižek, p. 153.

above, that Hoyle repeatedly affirms, and invites his audience to affirm the act of being awkward – to become hard to deal with and cause difficulties within the social structures that simultaneously limit and produce our subjectivities. As stated, to use Critchley's explanation, it provides an ethical experience based upon the demand for the approval of a 'sense of the good' that is rooted in awkwardness. This requires us, firstly, to let go of a sense of subjectivity that is, as Wallace suggests, sustained through the 'bourgeois predicament' of being attached to projects that go against our ethics. Secondly, it requires us to affirm an experience of subjectivity that emerges through a relationship to an unpredictable, uncontainable and impenetrable Other.

So Much to Answer For

This section focuses on the awkwardness of two 'car-crash' moments in Hoyle's film works that suddenly and significantly altered the tone of his interactions with the public. The first car-crash incident that I will discuss occurred during the making of the 2009 short documentary film *Manchester (So Much To Answer For)*.⁵¹ The film followed Hoyle as he meandered through Canal Street and the area of Manchester, UK, described as the 'Gay Village'.⁵² Along the way he interviewed the partygoers, pub clients, club-managers and publicans that he met. His outfit for this outing was a black tie

⁵¹ 'Manchester (So Much To Answer For)', on *Dave's Drop in Centre*, dir. by Nathan Evans, perf. by David Hoyle (Arts Council England, 2009 [on DVD]).

⁵² 'Gay Village', *Canal-St*, <<http://www.canal-st.co.uk/?Gay-village>> [accessed 03/07/2012].

with a large anarchy sign on the bottom, a black jacket and knee-length skirt, and a pair of very long black and white socks. He was, as usual, decorated with thick layers of make up and a reddish-black wig, all applied and adorned with the anarchic imprecision that occurs throughout his performance attitude and style. The general tone of his encounters with the public was dominated by an unnervingly volatile conviviality and a deceptive and sinisterly insistent enthusiasm. It is, ironically, through a relentless optimism that Hoyle managed to pluck at some of the murkier consumerist and exploitative agendas of what might at first appear as a site for the liberating celebration of life outside the heteronormative hegemony.⁵³ Here he puts affirmation to work, performing agreement in order to draw out the unsavoury attitudes. At one point, for example, he chats with a bar-owner who revels in his ability to “rip-off” (i.e. charge too much to) tourists “morning, noon and night” and gleefully acknowledges the fact that ‘gays will pay through the nose’ (i.e. pay too much).⁵⁴ Thus Hoyle displays a crafty ability to lead the interviewee into the hidden underside of his business and his capacity to draw out the darker sides of individual’s motivations and opinions.

The car-crash section of the film began in the doorway of a nightclub, and then abruptly spilled out onto the pavement. It began with Hoyle, holding a suspicious glass of clear liquid in his hand, chatting with a young clubber who frequents the area in order to get “pissed every night”.⁵⁵ It was a wholly

⁵³ Unknown Author ‘They’re Only Here for the Queers’, *The Independent*, 06 April 2000, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/theyre-only-here-for-the-queers-721341.html> [accessed 09/09/2011].

⁵⁴ ‘Manchester’

⁵⁵ ‘Manchester’

convivial encounter at first, though Hoyle's response that the young man's alcohol drenched experience of the 'village' "sounds like a dream come true" was again entwined with the queerly sincere affirmation of potentially destructive behaviour that runs throughout these encounters and his wider performance practice. The tone then took a swift, uncomfortable turn when an employee of the nightclub asked the pair to move away from the club's doorway. I have written out the sections of Hoyle's hyperbolic response to her request in full here. This is in order to show how quickly it developed into an all out personal and political attack and clarify the relentless nature of his outburst:

Well we're allowed to film where we want. You don't own the pavement. You're a mere business. And we're not homing in, we're not interested in Baa Bar. We're not interested in you one bit.⁵⁶

After this initial snap, and as the young man who Hoyle was originally interviewing stares determinedly ahead, grinning nervously as if it's not happening, Hoyle continues his bombardment:

I know it's your world love, but, you know, you work within the corporate structure. Some of us don't, and therefore we don't have that neurosis. Get me? You're working on behalf of capitalism. It's making you very vigilant and very, like, ugh ugh ugh ugh ugh. Relax. You know the world will keep on turning. The world will keep on turning irrespective of the filming that's going on at this street corner.⁵⁷

At this point the interviewee skulked off, despite Hoyle's plea for him to come back. The club's employee attempted to interject, explaining that all she was

⁵⁶ 'Manchester'

⁵⁷ 'Manchester'

asking them to do was move away from the door, Hoyle cut her off, stating “We’ve lost the interview now. Forget it”. Then he turned to direct his sardonic stream of outrage and irritation to the camera:

You know, there’s too much in this country, where people are making decisions on behalf of their employers. Your employer doesn’t give a shit about you. You are but a living unit. That’s all you can ever hope to be. And should you die, your employer will replace you with another living unit. End of. So those of you who are like ‘don’t film, don’t do this, don’t do that, my employer won’t like it’, I curse you, I hope you die, I hope you’re HIV, you deserve to be. You’re cunts. Anybody who speaks on behalf of their employer, to me, is a stupid cunt. And you have negated yourself and allowed somebody to be more powerful than you.⁵⁸

In the next scene, which looked like it takes place in a different location, Hoyle continued on in a similar manner. The reason I have described the details of this section, which takes up about four minutes of this fifteen minute film, is firstly, because it offers a clear example of the kind of awkward and eye-watering car-crash moments that Hoyle is infamous for, and to which this writing responds. Secondly, this personal and public collision can be reasonably framed as unintended. However, it was left in the film and allowed to take up nearly a third of its timeframe. The outburst was an abrupt shift away from the far more subtly interrogative and humorously revealing tone of his words and actions in the rest of the film. It confronted the viewer with a project that captured and displayed an awkward flip between celebration, conviviality and subtle criticality and a relentless outburst of antagonism.

⁵⁸ ‘Manchester’

A Village Stroll

An unexpected blossoming of conviviality occurred in the short documentary entitled *A Village Stroll with David Hoyle*.⁵⁹ In the second part of the film Hoyle is shown around Vauxhall City Farm, Vauxhall, South London, by a small group of young children. The film follows much the same premise as *Manchester (So Much To Answer For)*, Vauxhall being an area of London known for its plethora of LGBTQ bars, clubs and saunas. The motivation, according to Hoyle, for visiting the farm is his mischievous declaration that once homosexuality has been fully accepted then the taboo of interspecies love should also be tackled. The film starts with a discussion of the various merits of taking animals for lovers (“think of the colour and texture of a budgie”⁶⁰) as Hoyle totters amongst the pigs, ducks, goats and other livestock of a city farm. It ends with Hoyle being emotionally overwhelmed by the non-judgemental nature of a group of children who volunteer at the farm. Having enthusiastically shown him to the pumpkins, discussed the merits of animal faeces for growing flowers, and detailed the activities of their summer holidays at the farm, these children brought out the following response from Hoyle:

Can I just say that I’ve loved my time with you and I’m also... you know... You don’t seem to have a problem with my look or the way I am, and it’s so sweet of you. Because some adults, they can be really funny, and a bit odd and a bit weird, but you’ve been beautiful and you’ve made me feel very, very comfortable and I thank you very much

⁵⁹ ‘A Village Stroll with David Hoyle’, on *Dave’s Drop in Centre*, dir. by Nathan Evans, perf. by David Hoyle, (Arts Council England, 2009 [on DVD])

⁶⁰ Hoyle, ‘A Village Stroll’.

for that. Thank you.⁶¹

Next, he gave away his necklace to a young girl, they had a group hug and finally an emotional and overwhelmingly grateful goodbye. As in *Manchester (so much to answer for)* the encounter is followed by a speech to camera. However, this time Hoyle is celebrating how refreshing it was to be with children who accepted someone who “doesn’t believe in gender”, and ends with him declaring that he hasn’t been spoken to with such ‘courtesy and kindness for a very long time’.⁶² In a sense, this second incident is also a kind of car-crash, unexpectedly knocking the titillating risk of confrontation and the hilarious trajectory of increasing provocation wildly off course.

The incidents I have described in these two documentaries are the antithesis of each other. One starts in strategically convivial conversation and ends in brutal antagonism. The other starts out with a titillating provocation (exploring and promoting bestiality) and ends with heart warming, child-friendly conviviality. The unabashed inclusion in the films affirms the importance of these abrupt shift of tone in Hoyle’s practice. As well as linking to the pursuit of being ‘real’ discussed in the section on affirmation above, it also challenges the idea of constructing and facilitating participatory performances based on a particular tone (i.e. conviviality or antagonism).

Conclusion

⁶¹ ‘Hoyle, ‘A Village Stroll’.

⁶² ‘A Village Stroll’.

Hoyle immerses audiences and participants in complex, contradictory and fragile modes of affirmation, has acerbic, volatile outbursts in 'feel-good' participatory projects, and embraces heart-melting moments of good feeling in titillating and antagonistic interventions. In my first chapter I mentioned that Claire Bishop's critique of aesthetic and socio-political validity within the social turn is examined and challenged by Shannon Jackson.⁶³ Particularly important for me here is Jackson's plotting of the ways Bishop's argument relies on a reductive reliance on oppositional polarizations such as "1) social incorporation versus social antagonism; 2) legibility versus illegibility; 3) radically functional versus radically nonfunctional; 4) artistic heteronomy versus artistic autonomy".⁶⁴ Jackson works meticulously and cannily to trouble the aesthetic work vs. social work polemic that underlies Bishop's critique. However, for me, it is Bishop's pitting of social conviviality against social antagonism, of 'feel good' art against 'feel bad' art that is reductive and exclusionary. Hoyle's practice goes some way to demonstrating what is ignored in Bishop's loose and presumptive categorization of work into feel-good and feel-bad. It is these over-simplified categorizations of conviviality and antagonism that have the potential to ignore and undermine the potential for practices and identities such as Hoyle's to enrich our understanding of what it means to be socially engaged. Hoyle's insistent injection of awkwardness into acts of affirmation, and his allowance for conviviality and

⁶³ Shannon Jackson, 'Social Practice', in 'P-S', *Performance Research*, 11:3, (2006) 87-126; 'What is the "Social" in Social Practice?: comparing experiments in performance' in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136-150; *Social Works: performing arts, supporting publics* (Oxon and NY: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁴ Jackson, 'Social Practice', 115.

antagonism to collide can be usefully framed as an intervention into the social turn art and performance. This is because it troubles both normative notions of social and artistic responsibility and accountability and underlying demands for anti-social antagonism in experimental art practice.

In this sense Hoyle's ethical position pushes himself and his audiences to cut through the varying demands made upon performers and artists through discourses such as those that surround the social turn in art and performance. In doing so he commits himself to a 'Real' beyond the categorisations and clarifications of such discourses, wilfully risking the kind of symbolic death that results from rejecting such acknowledgement. The participatory elements of his live performances demand that participants affirm and join him in this commitment. The awkwardness arises through the unstable, uncontainable and self-destructive nature of this commitment. However, this awkwardness also has the potential to frame instability, uncontainability and self-destruction as causes themselves. By demanding our affirmation of such causes, Hoyle implicitly affirms and celebrates the existence of those for whom they are essential attachments and ways of being.

Chapter 5

Getting involved with the Neighbour's Thing: Reactor and their big Others

The first part of this chapter responds, once again, to Claire Bishop's statement that collaborative artists should pursue desires instead of following the duty of neighbourly love. Here I focus on the psychoanalytic concept of neighbourly love, as outlined in the previous chapter. However, this chapter does not frame Reactor's participatory projects as a display of their own love, or not, for their neighbours (a.k.a. their participants). Instead I focus on the way in which Reactor's work engages participants with the complications and problems of following the 'love thy neighbour' injunction. My approach to these complication follows Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian approach to neighbourly love, which is based on Jacques Lacan's three 'orders' that structure reality: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic.¹

The second half of the chapter focuses specifically on the figure of the 'big Other', which, as discussed, is related to the Symbolic Order. This responds, in part, to the concluding statements of the first section of this chapter, in which I propose that Reactor's model of structuring participatory performances reinforces the idea that the big Other is, at best, fallible, fragile,

¹ Slavoj Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,' in *The Neighbor: Three Enquiries in Political Theology*, Kenneth Reinhard, Eric L. Santner, and Slavoj Žižek (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp.134-190.

and dysfunctional, and, at worst, non-existent. This means that there is no authoritative figure, or single, infallible cause that acts as a guarantor of our decisions and actions as we interact with others (our 'neighbours'), or onto whom/which we can delegate responsibility for those decisions and actions. As Žižek writes, there is 'no "big Other" guaranteeing the consistency of the symbolic space within which we dwell: there are just contingent, punctual and fragile points of stability'.² The second section of this chapter explores the opportunity, offered in Reactor's *Big Lizard's Big Idea* project to playfully explore the paranoia that emerges through the *belief* that there *is* an organising figure or cause behind our interactions. Reactor have described the aim of their practice as being to 'explore the ways in which cohesion of social groups is maintained through shared belief systems and collective action'.³ Thus, my reading of their work through the concept of the big Other follows their own interests. This section is supported by the Žižekian argument that it is not enough to simply approach the big Other as non-existent, but that we should acknowledge its status as a 'subjective presupposition', meaning it 'exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists*'.⁴ In other words, there *is* an external, organising principle or ideology behind our interactions because we behave as if there is one. This 'organising principle' is revealed to be not, as Bishop would suggest, based on being good to one another (loving thy neighbour), but one based on the relentless pursuance of enjoyment.

² Slavoj Žižek, 'The Real of Sexual Difference', in *Interrogating the Real* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), pp. 293-316, (p. 306).

³ 'Reactor', *Reactor*, <http://reactor.org.uk/>, [accessed April 30, 2013].

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), p. 10.

Reactor and Neighbourly Love

Reactor is an art collective based in Nottingham, UK that develops immersive, participatory projects. The group emerged from a curated event entitled *Reactor* that occurred throughout four floors of a Nottingham warehouse in 2002. Their early works, typified by this and the series of numbered events called *Function* (2000-2005, 2012) showcased individual members' artworks alongside a variety of invited performance and installation artists who specialise in interaction and participation. These were tightly scheduled showcase-style events that occurred most often at Reactor Towers, Arkwright Street, Nottingham, as well as other artist-occupied buildings and art galleries. Those attending were invited to experience a series of overlapping encounters, participatory performances and interactive games, each devised by a different Reactor member or guest artist. Participants in the first event, for example, could add to a flock of origami birds, lie on a deflating air mattress and squeeze the air out through a tin whistle attached to its nozzle, or interact with a large string puppet monkey. More recent projects, since 2005, such as *Total Ghaos* (Crocus Street, Nottingham, 2005), *Big Lizard's Big Idea* (Donau Festival, Krems, Austria, 2009; Wunderbar, Newcastle, 2009; "Playing the City 2" Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany, 2010) and *The Green Man and Regular Fellows* (Trade Gallery, Nottingham, 2011), have taken the form of conspiratorial role-play games, sinister social experiments, and theatricalised relational aesthetics, each with an idiosyncratic ramshackle tone of irreverence, farce and frivolity. Rather than a curated series of individual artworks by a range of different artists, they are intricately

constructed fantastical 'worlds' with playful and complex hierarchical systems of knowledge and authority. Reactor, their guest artists and performers, and their participants take on and switch between predetermined roles, characters, and administrative positions with varying degrees of immersion and pretence.

Total Ghaos, Reactor's largest project to date, is the clearest example of their interactive role-play events. It was a three-day participatory project, preceded by two years of publically sited interventions, rallies, campaigns and performances, each of which claimed to be promoting and developing the elusive 'Ghaotic' political system. They define 'Ghaos' as the 'method by which the Reactor Party govern its behaviour and actions':

The 4 definitions of Ghaos are as follows: 1) utter light-hearted confusion. 2) cheerful formless matter supposed to have existed before the universe's carefree creation. 3) dissolute. 4) showy behaviour so unpredictable as to appear random.⁵

In the final three-day event, from 7-9 October 2005, participants took on various changeable roles and shifting hierarchical statuses in a slapstick totalitarian theme-park raucously constructed out of cardboard and scaffolding in another disused Nottingham warehouse. Individuals would arrive, hand in their mobile phones, watches and bags, be given a new identity, and be systematically inducted into the 'Ghaotic' society. Once in, they were given a role in the system, ranging from a cloak-room attendant to digging on their

⁵ Reactor, 'FAQs', *Ghaos* <<http://reactor.org.uk/totalghaos/faq.html>> , [accessed 20 October 2010]

knees in a polystyrene ‘gem mine’, through to joining the Ghaos Army or working undercover for the ‘RBI’ (Reactor Bureau of Investigation). Each role came with its own level of accessibility and benefits and participants, performers and Reactor members would swap between these roles throughout the event. There were only a limited number of key positions that were unavailable for participants to take on. These included ‘Uncle Commi’, the mythical, pantomimic despot who developed and ran the *Ghaotic* system, and ‘Big Nurse’, the boss of the ‘Asylum’ to which participants would be sent if they transgressed the rules or failed to fully participate. Curator and writer Jennie Syson, who attended the *Total Ghaos* event, describes a familiar experience of this unfixed relationship between knowledge, experience, and hierarchy:

Just as at school, the people in the middle management positions were just as ignorant as me: not yet working on the highest echelons of the hierarchy – individuals who had not created the strata system themselves, but swept along by the euphoric theatricality of it all.⁶

This allowance for participants to quickly find themselves in positions of authority and ‘knowledge’ in various Reactor projects interferes with our understanding of the degree to which fellow participants are ‘involved’, and who is and who isn’t ‘in charge’. Syson’s response provides a brief insight into the unstable yet potentially exhilarating nature of the gatherings Reactor facilitate. Summarising this approach, artist and researcher Mel Jordan, states that, in these projects ‘Reactor see to it that working with others is

⁶ Jennie Syson, ‘Ghaos Theory’ *Left Lion*, 23 October 2005, <<http://www.leftlion.co.uk/articles.cfm/title/ghaos-theory/id/941#.UYD0BollabM>> [accessed 30 April 2013].

understood as complex and dirty'.⁷ By reading their recent practice through Slavoj Žižek's engagement with the Imaginary, Real and Symbolic dimensions of neighbourly love, I aim to unpick the complexity and dirtiness of the encounters they facilitate and add 'awkward' to this list of descriptors.

Žižek has engaged with the theological, socio-political and philosophical problems of the Christian injunction to 'Love Thy Neighbour' throughout his works.⁸ My analysis of Reactor's practice relies specifically on Žižek's descriptions of neighbourly love in line with the three Lacanian registers that structure our reality, introduced above.⁹ The first of these registers is the 'Imaginary', the element of the neighbour I recognise as similar to myself. The second is the 'Symbolic Order' (the big Other), the unwritten rules that structure and facilitate my encounter with him or her. Thirdly is the 'Real', the monstrous impenetrable 'Thing' that lies beneath our neighbour's recognisable surface and which Lacan defines as 'impossible for us to imagine'.¹⁰ Žižek describes the essential part that each of Lacan's three registers play in our encounter with our neighbours:

So no axis between the two terms can subsist without the third one: if the functioning of the big Other is suspended, the friendly neighbor

⁷ Mel Jordan, 'Ivan's Dogs, We Provide the Smiles: Interview with Mel Jordan,' *Reactor 2006-2011* (Reactor, 2012 [on DVD]).

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, 'Love Thy Neighbour, No Thanks!', in *The Plague of Fantasies*, 2nd ed, (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 55-106; 'Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself', in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), pp. 34-62; 'Slap Thy Neighbor!', in *Living in the End Times*, (London and New York: Verso, 2010), pp. 119-127.

⁹ Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters', p. 144.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dannis Porter (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 125.

coincides with the monstrous Thing (Antigone); if there is no neighbor to whom I can relate as a human partner, the symbolic Order itself turns into the monstrous Thing which directly parasitizes upon me (like Daniel Paul Schreber's God who directly controls me, penetrating me with the rays of jouissance). If there is no Thing to underpin our everyday symbolically regulated exchange with others, we find ourselves in a Habermasian "flat," aseptic universe in which subjects are deprived of their hubris of excessive passion, reduced to lifeless pawns in the regulated game of communication.¹¹

For me this theory of the neighbour provides an exemplary description of Reactor's participatory practice. They construct worlds that, on the surface appear like an 'aseptic', 'regulated game of communication', but which are underpinned by a persistent sense of impenetrable 'Thing-ness'. This duality demonstrates a recognisable Žižekian approach in Reactor's facilitation of neighbourly encounters.

In my reading, Reactor insistently return to the sinister, unpredictable and unknowable elements of interactions between neighbours. Thus, in the section on 'Imaginary Neighbours' below, I discuss how Reactor often make it difficult to ascertain who is a facilitating artist (i.e. a member of Reactor) and who is a participant at their events. This can mean that unnerving questions around the position and motivations of others haunt the neighbourly encounters Reactor facilitate. Thus, any sense of an aseptic, convivial get-together of recognisable 'Imaginary' others is undermined. In the section entitled 'Reactor's big Others' I will discuss how Reactor playfully over-identify with the reliance of the friendliness of our interactions on a facilitating big Other. They construct farcical Symbolic networks in which pantomimic despots watch over neighbourly encounters. Layered on top of this is the

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters', p. 144.

peculiar positioning of Reactor itself as a subjectivised big Other whose elusive desires seems to motivate their on-going participatory practice. This exemplifies the psychoanalytic concept of a big Other that enables neighbours to interact without direct exposure to each other's monstrous 'Thing'. It simultaneously alludes to the way these friendly interactions between recognisable neighbours play a key role in containing the disastrous potential of monstrous tyranny inherent in the Symbolic Order. For me, the farcical tyrants and unstable structures of Reactor's projects foreground this symbiotic relationship between the Symbolic and the Imaginary in neighbourly encounters.

Reactor as the Imaginary Neighbour

In Žižek's discussion of the neighbour he describes the 'Imaginary other' as 'my fellow human beings with whom I am engaged in the mirrorlike relationships of competition, mutual recognition, and so forth'.¹² Reactor's use of character and role-play, their insistence on a committed fidelity from participants to the fantasy of the systems they are immersed in, the ambiguity of fellow participant's proximity to the core of the project and its creators, and the tightly structured nature of individual interactions and participation all work to avoid a domesticated gathering of fellow humans based on mutual-recognition. It should already be clear that Reactor do not readily encourage a hollow and tolerant love of our neighbour as an easily recognisable fellow

¹² Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters,' p. 143.

human. Importantly, this attitude towards Otherness spills out of individual events and into Reactor's on-going practice as a collaboration.

The Imaginary dimension of Reactor itself would be the individual, recognisable human beings that make up the collective: the individuals who meet to collaborate, devise, develop, produce and administrate the frame work of each project. It is these individuals who answer questions in interviews and who present and discuss documentation of their work with audiences at artist's talks. They are the element of Reactor that we might look at, listen to, or address in other ways whilst making the assumption 'so this is who Reactor are'. We could have an 'Imaginary relation' with them, defined not through 'illusion' but through a meeting of egos 'played out in terms of but one opposition: same or different'.¹³ When we encounter them, we might experience love or hate depending on their similarities or differences to our own Imaginary selves. Unfortunately, Reactor often makes it difficult to know if and when we are encountering the individuals that devise and facilitate each project.

As far as I know, at the time of writing, Reactor is made up of four men. Niki Russell, Daniel Williamson and Phillip Henderson have, and continue to be 'core' members since the first Reactor event in 2002. The fourth member is Bruce Asbestos, who joined through the 'secret membership' scheme. Each year, on 11 November, Reactor attempt to recruit a 'secret member' through a covert initiation procedure called 'Martinmas Interviews'. Secret membership

¹³ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (New Jersey and West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 84.

lasts for one year. Whilst it is unknown if there is a current secret member, or what the role of this member entails, they have declared that for the six years before 2013 no-one was capable of filling the role.¹⁴ Reactor have now revealed that artist and curator Asbestos was the secret member from 2013-2014, and is now a publically acknowledged member. I do not know if there is a current secret member (it is not me).¹⁵

The existence of secret membership, as well as the insistence that ‘the group expands and contracts from project to project through inclusion of other collaborating artists and co-participating audience members’ makes it awkward to qualify Reactor’s practice in terms of the individual cultural positions of its members.¹⁶ It certainly does not allow for the psychopathologising approach discussed in my chapter on psychoanalysis. Reactor’s secretive and fluxing membership scheme can be read as one of a series of intentional avoidances of attempted humanisation. Through this, they persistently resist the contemporary ideology, identified and critiqued by Žižek, of ‘understanding’ through engagement with personal stories.¹⁷ By burying their individual, Imaginary selves in a tangled matrix of shifting memberships, role-play games, red herrings, and false identities, Reactor refuse to engage their participants as tolerable, recognisable, mundane neighbours. In other words, they avoid the humanising, qualifying, revelatory positioning that theatre scholar Alan Read describes as ‘azza’s, (for example,

¹⁴ Reactor, ‘Project: Martinmas Interviews,’
<<http://reactor.org.uk/projects/martinmas>> [accessed April 30, 2013].

¹⁵ Reactor, ‘Project: Martinmas Interviews,’
<<http://reactor.org.uk/projects/martinmas>> [accessed December 4, 2014].

¹⁶ ‘Primary: Reactor’.

¹⁷ Žižek, *Violence*, p. 46.

‘as a male academic’).¹⁸ Exemplifying such self-positing, it is appropriate here to state that I write ‘azza’ lightly dyspraxic, male performance art academic/ performance artist who has, on and off since 2003, worked with, for, and alongside Reactor without ever getting beyond the proximity level of ‘guest artist’. From this position I read Reactor’s secretive and fluxing membership scheme as one of a series of intentional avoidances of attempted humanisation and the reduction of Reactor to a collection of Imaginary individuals.

Reactor’s big Others

Žižek’s description of a Thing-less world in which subjects are ‘reduced to lifeless pawns in the regulated game of communication’ is reminiscent of the critique Bishop aims at collaborative, relational, and participatory works such as Rirkrit Tiravanija’s.¹⁹ Recent Reactor projects, with their unabashed indulgence in frivolity and their cartoonish, theme-park aesthetic could also be mistaken as the kind of convivial-gathering as artwork criticized by Bishop. However, as well as obscuring any sense of ‘unified subjects’ through unstable role-play and blurred artist-participant boundaries, there is another disruptive position that troubles the surface coziness of their events. This is the unsettling sense that in Reactor projects interactions between participants might not be occurring primarily for those participating, but for a mysteriously motivated big Other. This big Other’s enjoyment seems to entail an unsavoury

¹⁸ Alan Read, *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement: The Last Human Venue* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 76.

¹⁹ Žižek, ‘Neighbors and Other Monsters’, p. 144.

reliance on the outcomes of our interactions, thus heightening our trepidation in fully immersing ourselves in getting along with our neighbours.

The big Other is usefully summarised by Žižek as the ‘uncanny subject who is not simply another human being, but the Third, the subject who stands above the interaction of real human individuals’.²⁰ Thus, in any interaction or collaboration with my neighbour there is always a third figure facilitating, judging and manipulating our encounters. As Žižek explains, when I encounter others, ‘I am never merely a ‘small other’ (individual) interacting with other ‘small others’: the big Other must always be there’.²¹ This consistent presence is essential for our relationship with our neighbour:

In order to render our coexistence with the Thing minimally bearable, the symbolic order qua Third, the pacifying mediator, has to intervene: the ‘gentrification’ of the Other-Thing into a ‘normal fellow human’ cannot occur through our direct interaction, but presupposes the third agency to which we both submit – there is no intersubjectivity (no symmetrical, shared relationship between humans) without the impersonal symbolic Order.²²

Reactor perform an over-identification with the importance of this ‘impersonal symbolic Order’ (and its development into a ‘personal big Other’) in their provision of a dubious description of their working methodology:

The way that it is now, and it wasn’t always this way in the past, is that Reactor is an individual. Reactor is an entity and we work for Reactor. Rather than it being a kind of collaboration whereby I work with these two people and we come up with whatever we come up with, we come

²⁰ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 41.

²¹ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 9.

²² Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions on the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 165; ‘Neighbors and Other Monsters,’ pp. 143-144.

up with what Reactor comes up with.²³

Thus they name and subjectivise the Symbolic Order that structures their creative work as 'Reactor'. When I asked members to expand on the existence of Reactor as an 'entity' or an 'individual', Williamson described how, although each member might have clear, but different ways of approaching an idea or responding to a situation, they have developed a reference point of 'What would Reactor do?'.²⁴ Again, this aligns with Žižek's description of a big Other that operates as a 'symbolic space' that acts 'like a yardstick against which I can measure myself'.²⁵ Reactor are explicit and open about the importance of a big Other that not only facilitates neighbourly encounters, but that also provides a figure for whom these encounters take place.

Reactor's apparent fascination with what Žižek describes as the 'anonymous mechanism of the symbolic order' becoming 'personified as a deity, a cause or an ideology' is further explored in the systems they provide for their participants.²⁶ Each of the worlds they conceive and facilitate includes a farcical leader that holds the place of a demanding Third in any interactions between participants. In *Total Ghaos* this was the character 'Uncle Commi', and in *Green Man and Regular Fellows* it shifted from the Landlord, to the titular vegetative deity (depending on how far into the project you delved). In *Big Lizard's Big Idea* it is the character of *Big Lizard* and his/her elusive

²³ Niki Russell in Bruce Asbestos, 'Reactor Interviewed by Bruce Asbestos,' *thisisnotacircular*, Trade Gallery, 24 June 2010.

<<http://www.tradegallery.org/thisisnotacircular.html>> [accessed 23 April 2013].

²⁴ Daniel Williamson, 'Interview with author', Skype, 29th January 2013.

²⁵ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, 9.

²⁶ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, pp. 40-41.

ideology of a *Big Idea*. Reactor describe the *Big Lizard* project as being 'centred on a Disney-esque mascot, whose irrepressible "fun" persona examined the nature of such characters'.²⁷ As demonstrated in my section on paranoia below, this project in particular demonstrates Reactor's apparent fascination with a surface of unreflective, convivial interactions between neighbours that is underpinned by sinister and impenetrable Otherness. In each of these projects encounters between participants were not framed around a unhindered 'getting to know each other' exchange of personal attributes, but through a mutual, antagonistic relationship to a deceptive and potentially manipulative big Other for whom they were enacted.

This playful over-identification with the necessity of a Third in any neighbourly encounter is the key to differentiating between the awkwardness of a Reactor project and the antagonism encouraged in the works that Bishop favours. Bishop's brand of antagonism is displayed, for example, in Sierra's *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (September 2000) for his exhibition at Kunst-Werke in Berlin.²⁸ The piece consisted of six Chechnyan asylum seekers concealed inside a series of makeshift cardboard boxes for four hours a day for six weeks. For Bishop, art works such as this are important because instead of offering 'an experience of transcendent human empathy that smooths over the awkward situation before us' they confront the spectator with 'a pointed racial and economic non-

²⁷ Reactor, 'Big Lizard's Big Idea', <http://reactor.org.uk/projects/big-lizards-big-idea> [accessed 4 September 2013].

²⁸ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 78-79.

identification: “this is not me””.²⁹ Bishop’s critical work, and the antagonistic practices she favours are thus helpful in supporting an understanding of the problems of relentlessly pursuing the recognizable in our encounters with neighbours. In other words, she also demands more from participatory and collaborative encounter than ‘feel-good’ gatherings that take place solely in the Imaginary register. Reactor, like Sierra, also do not ‘smooth over the awkward situation’ of neighbourly love. However, I would argue that the poignancy of a Reactor project also comes from an awkward experience of ‘this *is* me’. This is not to suggest that the experience on offer at a Reactor event is in any way comparable with the experience of a Chechnyan asylum seeker residing in a cardboard box. I merely suggest that, unlike Sierra’s work in which our privileged cultural positions are exposed for us, in front of us, in Reactor’s projects we are confronted with the domesticated and potentially exploited nature of our interactions in relation to a big Other. Reactor facilitate an uncomfortable confrontation with the impenetrable, demanding systems that structure and feed off my relations with my neighbour, whether that relationship is convivial or antagonistic, empathetic or ignorant. Of course this does not mean we can delegate responsibility for the tone or outcome of our encounters onto a tyrannical Other. Throughout Reactor’s practice they repeatedly confront us with our own complicity in constructing and perpetuating the systems that frame our interactions and the despotic characters for whom we interact.

²⁹ Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, 79.

Reactor and Neighbourly Love

For Žižek and, in my reading, for Reactor, the demand for neighbourly love 'smooths over awkwardness' when it negates one or more of the three Lacanian registers of reality. Particularly troubling is the reliance on an understanding of the neighbour solely as a recognisable fellow human with whom we can freely compare ourselves. This means an over-determination of the realm of the Imaginary and consequently an unwillingness to engage with the Real register of the neighbour's 'Thing-ness' or the Symbolic register that frames our interactions with him or her. In addressing the politics of this disavowal, Žižek provides two key critical observations. Firstly, in ignoring the Real of the neighbour we develop a mere 'tolerance of the Other in its aseptic, benign form'.³⁰ Thus, love for our neighbour risks becoming an act of depoliticised liberal tolerance through violent domestication. This results in justice being replaced with tolerance, and nobody wants to be merely tolerated. By obscuring their own recognisable, individual selves, and insisting that those who participate leave their own recognisable subjectivities and personal histories at the door Reactor work to side-step this benign form of neighbourly interaction. Secondly, Žižek emphasises the importance of acknowledging the omnipresence of a Third in any one-to-one encounter. This 'Third' is the Symbolic Order: the desiring 'big Other' that facilitates and potentially manipulates our encounters. The existence of the entity 'Reactor' to whom Russell, Williamson, and Tait (and potentially others) answer playfully alludes to our reliance on this desiring Other when meeting with

³⁰ Slavoj Žižek, 'Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism', *New Left Review* 225 (September-October 1997), 37.

neighbours. Meanwhile the farcical tyrants and deities that rule each world remind participants that the systems that structure their neighbourly encounters can be pathetically fragile and needy, or perhaps not exist at all.

Post-Relational Paranoid Play in Reactor's *Big Lizard's Big Idea* project

During my time with, for, and alongside 'Reactor' I have had various conversations in which it has been suggested that they 'get people to do stuff'. This is a claim often made by those who avoid participating in Reactor projects. The point of origin for the second half of this chapter lies in a desire to critically engage with this claim's uneasy suspicion and implied accusation of manipulation and conspiracy. This has developed into an engagement both with the paranoid assumptions about agency and honesty in Reactor's ongoing practice, and with the paranoia that, I claim, Reactor encourages participants to playfully immerse themselves in during individual projects.

Bishop's monograph, *Artificial Hells*, examines the development of participatory art from the hostile provocations of Italian Futurists in the 1910's through to the seemingly benevolent experiments in delegation and exploitation that occur at galleries and biennales in the 21st Century. In her conclusion she summarises this development as follows:

From the audience's perspective, we can chart this as a shift from an audience that demands a role (expressed as hostility towards avant-garde artists who keep control of the proscenium), to an audience that enjoys its subordination to strange experiences devised for them by an

artist, to an audience that is encouraged to be a co-producer of the work (and who, occasionally, can even get paid for this involvement).³¹

My own framing of the experience offered to participants in *Big Lizard's Big Idea* incorporates a complex and contradictory overlapping between the latter two perspectives. The mixture of enjoyment and subordination in Reactor projects is key to the experience of paranoia and play that I attribute to them. Reactor participants, I argue, are able to play at subordination, to critically reflect on where that subordination emerges from, and to confront their potential co-production in that subordination. These experiences loosely follow the definitions of clinical, critical and constructive paranoia that I outline below. Overall, my use of the term paranoia refers, firstly, to the unnerving sense that something more is going on than appears. In other words that there is a discrepancy between what we are being told or shown is happening and what is *actually* happening. Secondly, it refers to the belief that there is a single agent, or group of agents who control what is *actually* happening, who develop and perpetuate a hidden, but totalising concept and agenda. This second point, of course, relates to the awkward relationship Reactor develop and maintain with clarifying who they are and with maintaining an elusive idea of a big Other.

My examination of the complex entwining of playfulness and paranoia in *Big Lizard's Big Idea* is read through my own navigation between the psychoanalytic understanding of 'play' developed by Donald Winnicott and the Lacanian dissection of contemporary modes of 'enjoyment' developed and

³¹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 277.

supplemented by Žižek.³² The specific appropriateness of my application of psychoanalytic theory in this section half of the chapter is captured in Žižek's description of the desire by many in the 21st Century to bury it 'in the lumber-room of pre-scientific obscurantist quests for hidden meanings'.³³ The appeal of psychoanalysis here lies primarily in the fact that an 'obscurantist quest for hidden meanings' would, I suggest, make for a pithy description of the experience offered by the *Big Lizard* project and stands as a dominant definition of the types of paranoia that this chapter discusses. Thus, in employing psychoanalysis I am rigorously and playfully performing a response to what I see as the project's core invitation. My own awkward conflation of Žižekian and Winnicottian theory is, I argue, also appropriate because it matches the awkward vacillation between secure, maternal benevolence, and an insistent, contradictory, demands inherent in the character 'Big Lizard'.

As my argument develops through the theories of Winnicott and Žižek my use of the term 'play' begins to flicker between two awkwardly conflicting definitions. The first of these is the productive developmental activity reliant on the presence of a benevolent other and a supportive, clearly defined system. The second is the meeting of a demand for non-seriousness and enjoyment from a tyrannical master in a fragmented structure of incompleteness and contradiction. Thus, there is an uneasy ambiguity around whether participants in Reactor projects are participating under the auspices of a Winnicottian Mother, or the injunctions of a Lacanian Other. Throughout I address the

³² D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Routledge Classics ed. Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp.51-70; Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, pp. 103-104.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), p. 1.

various paranoid positions that might emerge in response to these Mother/Other figures. The ultimate aim of this response is to demonstrate how a paranoid position is not only about investigating and revealing hidden structures and characters, but also how such a position can be unwittingly complicit in constructing and perpetuating them. Thus, overall my psychoanalytic engagement with the various forms of paranoia present in *Big Lizard* argues that the project might, like Žižek's psychoanalysis, provide a space for play in which we can dwell upon the contemporary, insistent and 'strange ethical duty' to 'enjoy' and, more importantly, confront our complicit role in its perpetuation.³⁴

Fun

I interviewed members of Reactor for the *Reactor 2006-2011* DVD, and used the opportunity to discuss their playful experiments with participation.³⁵ Adopting the term 'fun' to refer to the play that Reactor facilitate (the term 'fun' occurs throughout the texts and scripts of *Big Lizard*) I asked Russell how relevant he felt it was to their practice. In his answer he concluded that it was 'relevant' but compared the invitation to have 'fun' in *Big Lizard* to an invitation made in the *Munkanon* project, which also took place at the Donau Festival in Austria in 2009. During my interview Russell describes how, in *Munkanon*, participants were invited to go on "the ride of a lifetime". He went on to assert that despite this invitation, there "isn't really a ride is there. Well there is. You end up in a car for a bit, then you end up in a space where there's no real

³⁴ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 104.

³⁵ Daniel Oliver, 'Munkanon: Interview with Daniel Oliver,' *Reactor 2006-2011* (Reactor, 2012 [on DVD]).

ride. You're kind of sat down, or you're doing this or that". He concluded that this is similar to *Big Lizard*, which is "presented as fun, and then the activities don't really equate to that". This clearly demonstrates a deceptive relationship with promotion and a playful attitude towards participants' expectations, something akin to Hoyle's desire to 'to promise things and not deliver'.³⁶ However, in the same interview, Williamson interjected into Russell's reply, undermining the simple and reductive idea of a mere bait and switch attitude towards experience, by insisting that 'when you look back at the *Munkanon* documentation, clearly people *are* having a lot of fun with these kind of activities'. Finally, ex-member Waring contributed by critiquing the position of the 'casual observers' that Reactor have worked hard to exclude from their projects, but who inevitably peer in and make assumptions about the kind of play that people are engaging and the agency they have in doing so. He stated that he thinks this concern with other people's playfulness is 'very characteristic of a particular moment that we're in where people worry that other people look like they're having fun, but they might have been tricked into having fun'.

Thus we have at least two layers of paranoia in relation to Reactor and Reactor's projects. Firstly, there is the paranoia of participants who develop an understanding that there is a level of deception, and secondly, there is the paranoia that observers and non-participants have about the agency and understanding of those participating and the motivations of those in charge. In other words, those who remain outside the project might develop concerns

³⁶ Hoyle, quoted in Butt, 'Just a camp laugh?', p. 51.

that those on the inside are not being appropriately informed on what is *really* going on. To summarise, Reactor admit to having a deceptive relationship towards playfulness. They invite us to play their game, but are deceptive and slippery in their disclosures of what this game entails. However, they also insist that this deception does not mean that people are not actually playing, suggesting that outsiders should be wary of making assumptions about the agency and understanding participants have or don't have as they play. Hence, whilst in my understanding, they invite participants to play a complex and multi-layered game of paranoia and investigation; they are simultaneously dismissive of the potential paranoid, critical readings of participants' experiences that emerge from those who have not participated.

The key questions that emerge from this practice pivot around agency, authorship and accountability. To what extent are participants given access to an understanding of the project they are in and what their role in it is? How much agency do participants really have in authoring and developing the project, and how much is the project is tightly pre-authored by Reactor? Who is accountable for the ethics in a project when its authorship is fragmentary and unfixed? Instead of working towards providing clear answers to these questions, my response here is to examine the potential efficacy of provoking and encouraging the sense of paranoia that they imply. In reference to current discussions around agency and emancipation in participatory performance, the key point here is that Reactor not only cause us to worry about the agency of participants, but they also create immersive role-plays in which participants are encouraged to play at worrying about their own agency.

Big Lizard

Anyone walking through Newcastle city centre in November 2009 would have passed by a mobile stage adorned with, and surrounded by, inflatable palm-trees, fold-down tables, green balloons, stickers, banners, bunting, childish crayon drawings, and a plethora of badges, banners and posters depicting a large cartoonish lizard and the words 'Big Lizard's Big Idea'. Here they would have been approached by one of several individuals dressed in chinos, blue plimsolls, and a Hawaiian shirt over a t-shirt with an image of the cartoon lizard on the front. This member of Big Lizard's 'entourage' would have invited, encouraged, and coerced them into finding out more about the 'Big Lizard' character and to get involved with the 'Big Idea'. The tone of the conversation would have been reminiscent of uncomfortably over-familiar encounters with street-based charity fundraisers, passive aggressive sales-people, sinisterly benevolent spreaders of religion, or scientologist stress testers. The potential participant might have become awkwardly aware of the occasional use of clumsy and unsubtle physical and verbal persuasion techniques. Series of questions to which he or she could only answer "Yes" would be followed by "So do you want to come on board with the Big Idea? Yeh?" All sensible queries on what this Big Idea is are met with evasive, unconvincing analogies - "The Big Idea is like a big bowl of soup. I once tried to drink a big bowl of soup all at once, and I caused a terrible mess" - and the insistence that the only way to really grasp what the Big Idea is, is to come "on board" and get involved. Importantly "having fun" is a key lure in the collection of participants. This is evident in the cartoonish aesthetics of the

work, the crass colourful costumes, the description of the mobile stage as a 'fun' bus, and the frequent use of the word 'fun' as bait in the entourage's conversations with potential participants.

Those who chose to get involved in the fun would learn that the first step for a participant wanting to 'get down' with Big Lizard and the Big Idea is to go up onto the mobile stage, sit at one of the tables, and draw a picture of him or herself and Big Lizard 'doing something'. Hours, or even days later, having fully committed him or herself to pursuing Big Lizard's Big Idea and enthusiastically engaged in a series of jolly team-building games, childish micro-performances, and esoteric one-to-one encounters, a participant could attend a 'champagne party' in a function room at Newcastle's Theatre Royal. The games and scenarios of play experienced by participants include hula-hoop and speed-stack competitions, a secretive ritualistic encounter with an alien oracle called 'Raman-Caa', being a guest in a television studio for the hand-puppet-based 'Big Lizard's Fun-Time Message Show', getting one's tongue checked and measured, and donning a cardboard Big Lizard mask and joining other participants and Big Lizard for a celebratory parade through Newcastle city-centre. As a guest at the party (on more than one occasion only one participant delved this far into the project), a participant might find themselves in fancy dress, playing blindfold-musical-chairs with nine other people they only know through their involvement in the project that day. Alternatively they may be recruited to host this party, organise games, decorate the room, and keeping the champagne flowing. Either way, it is unlikely they would be any closer to gathering an objective and totalising

understanding of who Big Lizard is, what he or she represents, or what his or her Big Idea might be. They might also be questioning why, and for whom, they've engaged in the activities and encounters that they experienced throughout the day.

Paranoia

I read *Big Lizard* as partly a playful microcosm of Frederic Jameson's postmodernism, in which attempts at 'cognitive mapping' are undermined by a non-representable totality and an experience of partial, fragmented and disparate cultural logics, occasionally resulting in paranoid conspiracy theories.³⁷ Importantly, instead of trying to resolve this fragmentation, allowing us to cognitively map ourselves through the provision of an easily consumable message, concept or ideal, *Big Lizard* further immerses us in this experience of partialities and the ominous sense of a 'non-representable totality'.

References to our pursuit of the consumable and blameable conspiracy theories that Jameson refers to make up a key part of the material of *Big Lizard*. The use of a costume that resembles a 'Grey' at the champagne party, the pseudo-psychological tests disguised as games and the (clumsy) attempts at hypnosis-based manipulation techniques all work to immerse participants in a world of recognisable clandestine knowledge and secret agendas.

Participants are offered the opportunity to play at paranoia, potentially recognising and performing themselves as obsessive conspiracy theorists, wildly connecting dots in order to access the 'truth' of the 'Big Idea'. The most

³⁷ Frederick Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992); Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 156.

prominent of the conspiracy theories referenced in *Big Lizard* is what Tyson Lewis and Richard Khan describe as the Reptoid Hypothesis: the belief, most commonly associated with controversial ex-football commentator David Ike, that the world is secretly run by big lizards.³⁸ Thus, there is sense of conspiratorial paranoia built into the fictional world of the role-play, where participants are asked to play at the paranoid pursuit of knowledge, 'discovering' the fantastical theories, back-stories and characters that lurk behind the *Big Lizard* micro-system. Of course, layered on top of this 'fun' paranoia, internal to the project itself, is the more realistic drive to understand the actual agenda of Reactor in relation to the agency and understanding of those who choose to participate. This exemplifies the layering of a playful 'clinical' paranoia with an unsettling 'critical' paranoia, definitions outlined by Douglas Kellner in his discussion of *The X-Files*. Kellner's 'critical paranoia' is a means to 'map the forces behind political, social, and personal events'.³⁹ Participants might employ this critical paranoia when thinking through what this participatory project is for and who the 'forces' that might be gaining from their participation are. 'Clinical paranoia' is less judicial and rational, instead disassociating itself 'from a reality principle' and retreating into a 'solipsistic world of persecutorial or occult fantasies'.⁴⁰ The merging of *Big Lizard's* references to far-fetched fantastical conspiracy theories with the very real questions about the desires and motivations of the collective Reactor facilitates a complex response to the work's play with critical and clinical

³⁸ Tyson Lewis and Richard Kahn, 'The Reptoid Hypothesis: Utopian and Dystopian Representational Motifs in David Icke's Alien Conspiracy Theory', *Utopian Studies* 16:1: 45–75.

³⁹ Kellner, p. 140.

⁴⁰ Kellner, p. 140.

paranoia. Thus, the project is ambiguous about whether participants should play at being concerned about the fantastical characters and fictional systems of power that run the *Big Lizard* system (to play at 'clinical paranoia'), or be genuinely concerned about the motives of the covert collective of people facilitating, encouraging and defining that play (to harbour and employ a critical paranoia). In other words, participants are not sure if they are being really duped by an art group, or just being asked to play the role of participants being duped by a Big Lizard. Not only might those who are participating worry about their agency whilst playing, but they also have the opportunity to *play* at worrying about agency. Of course as participants step in and out of the project, whether physically or through the manner of their private thoughts and interactions, they play across the critical and clinical approaches to paranoid investigation.

Reactor's Play

As stated above, my definition of the 'play' (referred to more often as 'fun' in the project's texts and scripts) on offer in *Big Lizard* emerges from select elements of the observations and analyses of child development developed by Donald Winnicott and the dissection of contemporary modes of Lacanian 'enjoyment' developed and supplemented by Žižek.⁴¹ The personification of these vying psychoanalytic characters in the overseeing persona of 'Big Lizard' goes some way to explaining why the entourage were consistently non-committal when describing the reptile's gender. In the following I describe

⁴¹ Winnicott, pp. 51-70; Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 104.

how, on the one hand Big Lizard is the maternal facilitator essential to Winnicott's play, and on the other he or she is the dictatorial paternal figure, pushing us to fully enjoy ourselves and taking pleasure in our inability to do so.

The element of Winnicott's observations and analyses that is important here is the crucial third stage of a child's development in relation to play.⁴² To summarise, after the first stage, in which baby and object (the mother) are merged, and the second, in which the presence of a mother figure facilitates a repudiation and re-acceptance of the object as separate from the subject, comes the third stage, in which a child is 'alone in the presence of someone'.⁴³ It is here that play emerges, reliant on a 'person who loves and who is therefore reliable', this person 'is available and continues to be available when remembered after a period of being forgotten'.⁴⁴ Here Winnicott is describing an essential outsider, a maternal figure whose presence allows for us to play in a state of solitude, whether we grow up with a mother in that role or a different adult.

I suggest that *Big Lizard's* 'entourage' sell themselves, the character of 'Big Lizard', and the elusive concept of the 'Big Idea' as an enmeshed collection of omnipresent, benevolent (M)Others that facilitates our play within the *Big Lizard* game. Thus, in *Big Lizard* the figure of the maternal Other appears not as a single adult agent, but as a mixture of characters, concepts and

⁴² Winnicott, pp. 51-70.

⁴³ Winnicott, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁴ Winnicott, p. 41.

structures which encourages productive play. Play relies on the participant's ability to recall and dwell upon the relationship of their actions to the maternal Otherness associated both with the character 'Big Lizard', and with the enveloping nature of the project itself. Alongside this, whilst many of the activities on offer rely on an interaction and engagement with other participants, there is also the potential for the development of an internal, solipsistic investigation of the relationship of individuals' actions and encounters to an elusive character and concept ('Big Lizard' and the 'Big Idea'). Thus both the character 'Big Lizard' and the elusive but omnipresent concept of the 'Big Idea' provide the Winnicottian notion of being 'alone in the presence of someone'.⁴⁵ However, the corporate sheen and ever-present sense of ulterior motives and undeclared desires simultaneously constructs a counterpoint to this benevolent, maternal Otherness. Thus Big Lizard also emerges as a pantomimic version of the tyrannical superego that Žižek suggests bombards us, in contemporary times, 'from all sides with different versions of the injunction "Enjoy!"'⁴⁶ In my reading of *Big Lizard*, a persistent, demanding figure who makes impenetrable demands exists alongside Winnicott's facilitator of play. It is, of course, not always clear which one of these figures participants are dealing with.

For Žižek the contemporary liberal capitalist subject *must* be able to fully enjoy 'from direct enjoyment in sexual performance to enjoyment in their professional achievement or in spiritual awakening'.⁴⁷ For Freud guilt was caught up in the violation of moral inhibitions, now we are made to feel bad

⁴⁵ Winnicott, p. 64.

⁴⁶ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 104.

⁴⁷ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 104.

when we are unable to enjoy.⁴⁸ My observation of this demand in *Big Lizard* is essential to my argument. The injunction 'Enjoy', overwhelmingly enwrapped in guilt and duty, has the potential to stop us reflecting on what we are enjoying and the effects of our enjoyment. However, in the following I suggest that *Big Lizard* has the potential to allow us to experience this demand for enjoyment whilst simultaneously being critically paranoid about what it really wants from us.

Enjoy!

In *Big Lizard* (as in the socio-political context it lampoons), 'Enjoy!' is not a directly spoken demand, and its consistently implicit nature make it difficult to pinpoint an example. The persisting encouragement of enjoyment, fun, and untroubled pleasure is built into the structure and aesthetic of the project. In order for us to fully participate in *Big Lizard*, to get closer to the elusive 'Big Idea' give ourselves over to enjoyment. And whilst we might receive looks of disapproval from fellow gallery- or theatre-goers if we're seen to be having too much fun, in *Big Lizard* the peer-pressure is geared towards getting carried away with it all. Aaron Juneau, in his review of a more recent Reactor project, *Green Man and Regular Fellows* (2011), captures this when he concludes that 'instead of stiffly sipping red wine and trying hopelessly to talk about Deleuze, I held hands with strangers, gave a grown man a piggyback and danced and howled with wonderful irregularity to the jingling of tambourines. Cheers!'⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 104.

⁴⁹ Aaron Juneau, 'Review: Green Man and Regular Fellows', *a-n*, <<http://www.a-n.co.uk/p/1650841>>, [accessed 22 June 2013].

Of course the superegoic injunction to enjoy is cruelly complicated through its emergence at a time when the objects offered for our enjoyment are ‘more hampered than ever’.⁵⁰ Products and experience are domesticated, rendered undamaging and safely virtualised, so that we are deprived of the truly enjoyable properties that might shift the experience from a mundane pleasure to a Lacanian *jouissance*.⁵¹ As Žižek demonstrates, we live in a system of ‘coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol’.⁵²

Reading the play on offer in *Big Lizard* through this Žižekian context suggests an awkwardly multi-layered experience. Firstly, the project insists that we overcome our inhibitions, fully and unabashedly participating in silly games with strangers, floppy hugs with Disney-esque mascots, and sugar and champagne fuelled partying in fancy dress. However, this push to ‘let yourself go’ is undermined by the family-friendly aesthetic, as well the occasional overwhelming collections of infants surrounding Big Lizard and the Fun Bus. These reminders of responsibility, decency, and apparent innocence might hinder an adult participant’s ability to fully let go and enjoy playing. Thus, after all this, Reactor’s play emerges as a split, between the injunction to fully, uncontrollably enjoy and the limited, hampered, ‘decaffeinated’ fun that is actually on offer.

⁵⁰ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 38.

⁵² Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 38.

It is these ‘splits’ between what is offered and what is experienced that are essential in generating the productive paranoia in Reactor’s projects. For example, the Winnicottian aims I observe in the project are unavoidably enmeshed in deception and failure. It is absurd to suggest that an art project and its characters can provide the safe and encouraging context for play that an adult caregiver can for their child. For all the gleeful infantilising elements of the project’s aesthetic and tone, it is still an art project aimed at adults. Of course the important element of the Winnicottian theory of child-development that I am working with is the essential relationship between the ability to productively and confidently play and the non-intrusive presence of a facilitating, benevolent other. However, my potentially reductive application of this psychoanalytic theory should foreground an important split that re-occurs in *Big Lizard* and throughout Reactor’s projects. This is the unnerving disparity between an enunciated invitation (to indulge in safe, infantile, productive play) and the position of enunciation (the impossibility of authentically facilitating this experience for adults in an art piece).

In his foreword to the second edition of *For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* Žižek discusses this split between enunciated and enunciating subjects in relation to Joshua Piven’s and David Borgenicht’s bestselling handbook, *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook* (2000). The book, which gives tips on surviving such scenarios as alligator or lion attacks is, Žižek claims, ‘totally useless in our social reality’.⁵³ Thus, whilst ‘the situations it describes are in fact serious, and the solutions are correct – the

⁵³ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. 2nd ed (London: Verso, 2008), p. xcii.

only problem is: *Why are the authors telling us all this? Who needs advice like this?*⁵⁴ Similarly, the peculiar discrepancy between the Winnicottian aims I observe (the benevolent facilitation of productive play) and the realities of setting up a 'fun' bus for adults on a public high-street reflects and leads to a questioning of authorial intentions and motivations: *Why are Reactor providing this? Who needs to play like this?* This split, also evidenced in Reactor's confessions in my interview and the uneasy questioning it encourages plays an essential role in the nurturing of paranoia in relation to the collective. To summarise, this brief psychoanalytic approach to play in *Big Lizard* observes a lovingly facilitating, omnipresent, but un-intrusive 'mother-figure' alongside an unnerving 'father-figure' who insistently permits and implicitly prohibits our playing. Again, these two figures related to the structure and concepts of the project itself, as well as being personified in the character 'Big Lizard'.

What is paranoia for?

Eve Sedgwick discusses the problems of celebrating paranoiac pursuits of knowledge, quoting her HIV activist friend on the conspiracies around the epidemics history: 'Supposing we were ever so sure of all those things – what would we know then that we don't already know?'⁵⁵ In line with this dismissal, I admit that it might well be over determining the socio-political efficacy of the work to suggest that *Big Lizard* offers a space for practicing an essential paranoid investigative attitude towards invitations of frivolous play and

⁵⁴ Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, p. xcii. Emphasis original.

⁵⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), p. 123.

enjoyment in the socio-political world outside the project. There is, however, a clear satirical edge to the project, which mocks the contemporary subject's uneasy relationship to the manic injunction "Enjoy!" and the impossibility of fully enjoying the banalised, decaffeinated experiences on offer. Ideally, participants might, after experiencing *Big Lizard*, develop their own critically paranoid relationship towards the motivations that lie behind the demand for enjoyment. Findings from these critically paranoid investigations might even lead to useful tools for resistance or change from within the systems we are unavoidably involved in.

However, I suggest a more productive and realistic outcome might be a confrontation with our own complicity in the perpetuation of this injunction. This relies on an understanding of a third type of paranoia, a constructive paranoia. If 'clinical paranoia' is a kind of affliction in which we obsess about the activities of malevolent others and 'critical paranoia' is the insistent pursuit of answers around who is really running things and what they are up to, then a 'constructive paranoia' enables us to escape the fact that there is no 'hidden subject who pulls the strings', by constructing the myth of a 'consistent, closed order'.⁵⁶ It is this constructive paranoia that arises in respect to the contradictions, fragmentation, contingencies, and splits in the fictional world of *Big Lizard* and the real world of Reactor. Our paranoia constructs the Others for whom we attempt and fail to enjoy. When we ask '*Why are Reactor providing this?*' in response to a contradiction between a position of

⁵⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 18-19.

enunciation and an enunciated position we rely on a fantasy of a consistent, self-knowing subject as 'author'. By resisting this fantasy and allowing for inconsistencies, fragmentations and splits to emerge in their existence as the 'author' Reactor and in the temporary systems they construct, Reactor remind participants of the role of their own paranoid fantasies in holding things together, in keeping things going, and in defining what and who these 'things' are.

Conclusion

I am aware that Reactor's anti-humanising confusion and enticement of paranoia could be read as an example of the 'rather clichéd masculinist, edgy, can't-pin-me-down vision of the unintelligible artist' that Shannon Jackson accuses art critic Claire Bishop of unquestionably celebrating.⁵⁷ Bishop's own critique of what she sees as the Christian ethics and New Labour politics of much recent participatory art does, as I have addressed, favour titillating, enigmatic artists, such as Santiago Sierra.⁵⁸ However, unlike Reactor, the unintelligibility of artists such as Sierra is not a consequence of the burying of individuals in a multitude of collaborators and participants. For me, Reactor's foregrounding of the awkwardness of interactivity and the facilitation of productive paranoia offers, like Hoyle's car-crashes, a welcome departure from the facilitation of participatory performance around a tone of *either* conviviality or antagonism.

⁵⁷ Jackson, 116.

⁵⁸ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' *October* 110, (Autumn 2004); 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *ArtForum*, (February 2006) <<http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=10274>> [accessed 1 February 2009].

These experiences are productive primarily because they encourage one to maintain a critical uneasiness in response to work that is insistently either feel-good or feel-bad. Again, like Hoyle, Reactor offer a participatory experience in which you can both participate and maintain a critical position in your participation. One of the implicit criticisms in Bishop's approach to the 'cozy situation' in which 'art does not feel the need to defend itself, and it collapses into compensatory (and self-congratulatory) entertainment' is that 'having fun' is *all* that is occurring.⁵⁹ A swift glance at the *Big Lizard* project is more likely to inspire this kind of criticism than encourage ethical concerns about the agency and understanding that participants have whilst playing. This is exemplified in my experience of many potential participants who declined to get involved because they presumed, on seeing the Fun Bus, that the project was 'for kids'. It was often not until individuals began participating, whether through extended conversations with entourage, or full engagement with the activities on offer, that the experience of potential deception emerged.

This creates a flipped version of the critique of worried observers that Jonathan Waring put forward in the interview described above. Here, instead of being concerned for participants, outside viewers, similarly to Bishop, see mundane playfulness. At the same, time those inside the project are provoked into worrying about the intentions behind that playfulness. Paranoia shifts from the unknowing outsider who naively 'gets it' (i.e. snappily reducing the project to an indulgence in frivolous fun) to the insider-participant whose developing proximity to the core of the project only increases its obscurity.

⁵⁹ Bishop, 'Antagonism', 79.

This refusal of a secondary audience is essential to the potential socio-political efficacy of *Big Lizard* and the experience it offers participants. It provides a context in which participants can ‘play’ with their ‘neighbours’ within the project, whilst simultaneously developing pleasurable ‘clinical’ and productive ‘critical’ paranoia in response to that play. It does not require that play ends, and then someone else looks at documentation and works out what was *really* going on.

Conclusion

I opened this thesis with the question ‘What might be ‘great’ about awkward methods of creating and facilitating participatory art and performance?’ This was a response to Battersea Arts Centre’s Ali Tomkinson’s admittance that when an artist “hasn’t got great facilitation skills” the BAC “back fill them with people who actually are really great at facilitation”.¹ I used Tomkinson’s term ‘great’ in order to clearly define the way this thesis aimed to flip the approach that her comment exemplifies. Thus, throughout the thesis I have identified moments in contemporary participatory performance that I have experienced as awkward. My primary focus was to argue for the efficacy of these moments. Through this I aimed to problematize the blind spots around awkwardness that I have observed in the discourses around the social turn in art and performance. This was partially motivated by an underlying desire to intervene in negative and exclusionary attitudes towards awkward modes of being, due to my own experiences with dyspraxia.

Each of the examples of awkwardness that I have discussed can be approached via Adam Kotsko’s definition of awkwardness as ‘a breakdown in our normal experience of social interaction while itself remaining irreducibly social’.² What follows is a summary of my experiences and findings. The first part of this conclusion collects together the various ways this thesis has met

¹ Ali Tomkinson, ‘Participate’, *Theatre Conversations: Participation and Activism* < <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/our-research/bcct/projects/theatre-conversations> > [accessed 12 December 2012].

² Adam Kotsko, *Awkwardness* (Ropley: O-Books, 2010), p. 15.

its key aims – to account for the efficacy of awkwardness and to reveal blind spots and exclusions in the discourses around the social turn in art and performance. The second part tackles Claire Bishop's demand that participatory art and performance carefully caters for secondary viewers.³ This segues into the proposition that a project about awkwardness should itself be efficaciously awkward. This entails a return to the ideas around dyspraxia and performative writing introduced in the preface of this thesis.

What Might be 'Great' About Awkward Methods of Creating and Facilitating Participatory Art and Performance?

This section identifies eight overlapping ways in which this thesis has accounted for the efficacy of awkwardness and highlighted blind spots in the discourse around the social turn in art and performance. These eight approaches address awkwardness in relation to the desire of others; awkwardness as a prompt to be awkward; awkwardness in relation to examining our role in a system or structure from within that system or structure; awkwardness as a contingent outcome that is nonetheless embraced; awkward affirmation of awkward causes; awkwardness in relation to the ambiguity, flux and multiplicity of the qualities and tones of an interactive performance or artwork; and, finally, awkwardness in relation to intentionality, capability and authority.

³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 9.

Firstly, using psychoanalytic theory, usually as developed by Jacques Lacan and supplemented and put to use by Slavoj Žižek, my framing of the ‘greatness’ of awkwardness has emerged as being attached to our experience of the proximity to desiring others. As outlined in my detailed writing on psychoanalysis in Chapter 2, this proximity in turn has the potential to foreground the Lacanian idea that the subject’s ‘desire is the desire of the other’.⁴ Participatory performance, and especially *awkward* participatory performance has emerged through this thesis as an ideal context in which to address and explore our existence as desiring subjects and our role in an interconnected matrix of other desiring subjects. Thus the key questions thrust upon us during experiences of participatory performance include ‘Am I acting in accordance with my desire?’ (Am I participating because I want to?), ‘How are my desires being affected by those around me?’ (Are other participants helping/hindering me to get what I want?), ‘What am I supposed to be desiring?’ and ‘What does the Other (the performance, the artist, the systems in which the performance occurs) desire from me?’ Awkwardness arises when the answers to these questions remain unclear or unfixed. It reminds us that we are complicit in the systems in which we participate and that our desires emerge through those systems. This challenges discourses around the social turn in art and performance, such as Claire Bishop’s, that base their ethical arguments on a distinction between projects in which artists or participants can pursue their desires and those in which they have to acquiesce to the desires of others.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Karnac, 1977), p. 235.

Secondly, awkwardness is great because it can signal a glitch, or a gap in the boundaries that we presume are framing and limiting our experiences.

Awkwardness here emerges as a call for us to test these boundaries and confront our own role in sustaining them. Participatory performance that wields awkwardness in this way allows for participants to discover or even create new possibilities, areas, and experiences from within the performance. Participants do not do this by directly breaking the rules, but by acting awkwardly in response to the realisation that they are complicit in maintaining the rules. Hence the efficacy of awkward (i.e. disruptive, uncomfortable, difficult) situations in participatory performances is connected to the way that they can trigger potentially awkward (i.e. disruptive, uncomfortable, difficult) modes of participation. As a participant in *Outside In* I allowed Bjørn Venø to undress me, and then, in response to feeling awkward, removed myself from what appeared to be the framework of his performance and placed myself in the framework of Franko B's (Chapter 1). This was not an act of destruction, but an act that revealed that Venø's performance was more open to malleability and extension than its tone and aesthetics suggested. The extent to which a participatory performance is 'open' or 'closed', therefore, is not dependent on the level to which the artist signals his intentions of openness. Instead the extent of a project's openness is revealed through the way it handles a participant's unexpected or awkward responses.

In Chapter 4 I demonstrated how David Hoyle's performances could appear to be wildly antagonistic dictatorships in which audience participants and guests risk being brutally admonished. However, Hoyle's commitment to spontaneity

and contradiction means that a participant's response can undo and redirect the dominating tones and power structures of the performance. Of course, it can also work the other way, triggering a shift from a convivial sense of communality and democracy to a torrent of despotic outrage. The only way of knowing whether interaction will have an impact on Hoyle's performance is to risk interacting, knowing that your mode of participation may fail embarrassingly or even lead to you being brutally rejected by Hoyle and his audience. Thus Hoyle's enticement for us to test the boundaries of his performances and to reveal the extent to which they are open to participation is guided by his Antigonian ethics. We are prompted to follow Hoyle's example of going too far, committing to an action or response that risks ending in exclusion and self-destruction.

In Reactor's awkwardly immersive extended role-plays, such as *Total Ghaos* and *Big Lizard's Big Idea*, whole areas and threads of the project open up in response to participant's decisions to test, push and rebel. The experience of visiting 'Big Nurse' in *Total Ghaos* is only available to those who are caught breaking the rules of the project. In *BLBI* a sense of paranoia might prompt participants to continually revisit, test, and question the project in order to find an unsavoury ideology, agenda or individual that rules over the project and benefits from our participation. Reactor cater for such investigative pursuits by preparing a myriad of different back-stories and allowing for a multitude of different paths to be taken through the project. Thus Reactor's projects open up in response to participant's awkward actions and interactions. Those who attempt to disrupt the project, or whose motivations for interacting are based

upon questioning the motivations behind the projects, are rewarded. In situations in which participants only follow clearly signposted routes through the project, or who interact in the way they feel they are being told to, the projects remain reasonably closed.

As is often the case in this thesis, to a certain extent a.a.s stand as the exception here. As discussed in Chapter 2, in projects such as *Xe54*, a radical openness to the contingencies of participation is clear from the moment a participant or collaborator enters. Openness is clearly signposted as an intention of the project. In fact their commitment to openness is so strong that much of the project's actions and interactions are built around a resistance to closure or defining clear territories. In the case of *Xe54* awkwardness arose partially as a result of AuntyNazi's attempts to delimit the project and reduce its openness to contingency. In this sense the awkwardness was *not* efficacious in terms of signalling gaps or glitches that prompt participants to test boundaries, because a.a.s and their collaborators repeatedly undermine those boundaries themselves. In this way *Xe54* could be framed as the kind of project in which, as Claire Bishop observes, 'the meaning of the work becomes so synonymous with the fact that its meaning is 'open' that it ends up foreclosing its open-endedness.'⁵ I discussed this critique in Chapter 1. Following Bishop, it could be argued that a.a.s' openness was foreclosed in the moments where they refused AuntyNazi's demands for boundaries. In other words, a.a.s were open to anything but closure. However, AuntyNazi and our demands were never excluded from the project or shut down. Our

⁵ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (Autumn 2004), 62, n. 30.

(failed) attempts to generate or expose rules, territories and definitive outcomes became part of the project, as did the awkwardness that arose as a consequence. This awkwardness had a significant impact on how the project developed, leading to 'new, anxious, work that was outside anything either group usually produced'.⁶ Therefore, whilst, unlike the other projects I discuss, it would be superfluous to test the boundaries of Xe54, AuntyNazi's awkward response to its *lack of boundaries* did have an important impact and led to the project developing in unexpected ways.

This focus on awkwardness in relation to openness contributes to the discourses around the social turn in art and performance by highlighting its limited approaches to a project's open or closed relationship to audience interactivity. These discourses focus on participatory performance and art projects that are clear about the extent to which participant's actions can have an impact. This overlooks projects in which there is an ambiguity around how much impact a participant can have, or where the extent of the impact is contingent upon the individuals and actions involved at that particular moment. This focus on awkwardness in relation to clarity and assumption around a project's openness also highlights a potential methodological problem of the discourses around the social turn in art and performance. Arguments are built around the ethics, efficacies and aesthetic value of a project based on identifying whether or not the project is open to the contingencies of audience participation. However, my dyspraxic

⁶ Stuart Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration', in *A thousand lines of flight – Anarchist Network Conference*, Loughborough University, 3-5 September 2012 < <http://stuarttait.com/writing/molecularpaper/> > [accessed 5/12/2014].

Collaborator/Performer-Participation-as-Research method has demonstrated that the extent to which a participatory project limits, absorbs or responds to different modes of interaction is often only discoverable from inside the project and in the moment of participation. This problematizes the lack of reference to participation-as-research in the discourses around the social turn in art and performance.

Fourthly, awkwardness is great because it prompts us to escape from a situation whilst simultaneously holding us in it and reflecting on our complicity in its perpetuation. In this sense, awkwardness is what Sianne Ngai describes as an 'ugly feeling', a sensation that tends 'to be diagnostic rather than strategic, and to be diagnostically concerned with states of *inaction* in particular'.⁷ When Christine Twite described her desire to 'externalise' her experience of being hugged by a stranger in Adrian Howell's *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding* she alludes to this sense of simultaneous *inaction* and diagnosis.⁸ Twite was *held*, both physically and through the impeding affects of discomfort. Diagnosis of the situation (Twite's focus on ascertaining the 'artistic meaning behind the work') arises through an attempt to break that hold.⁹ Whilst, in my experience of Venø's performance, such discomfort prompted a physical action that revealed the malleable boundaries of his performance, in Howell's it prompts us to remain *held* whilst re-

⁷ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London : Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 22. Emphasis Original.

⁸ Christine Twite, 'The One-on-One Festival at BAC', *Cultures of Spectatorship* <<https://culturesofspectatorship.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/the-one-on-one-festival-at-bac>> [accessed 20 August 2012].

⁹ Twite.

evaluating the ways in which desire manifests and flows in such intimate experiences. As I implied after my lengthy engagement with psychoanalysis in Chapter 2, this means confronting the idea that, as participants, we may be the object of performer's and other's desires, but also that our own desires emerge from, and through that position.

In each of the chapter's that focus on a particular case study I identified awkward strategies and modes of being that allowed for this paradoxical, awkward position of being both immersed in a project and maintaining some critical distance from it. In Chapter 3 I discussed the way in which Herman Melville's character Bartleby 'prefers not to' follow the demands put upon him in a particular situation, but also 'prefers not to' leave those situations. a.a.s take Bartleby-like position in relation to the places, contexts, and structures in which their projects take place. This includes the context of 'participatory performance', exemplified in their framing of their projects as collaborative and participatory whilst refusing to take significant steps towards increasing the numbers of participants. At times they were content to perform actions and rituals without anyone other than paid collaborators involved. Core member Stuart Tait is aware of the way a.a.s' approach to participation is unusual, noting that in 'most commentary about participatory art practice maximum success comes with maximum participation, in terms of numbers'.¹⁰ Just as Hoyle's Antigonian ethics encourages audience members to 'go too far' in their acts of intervention and participation, so a.a.s' Bartleby-like refusal to actively encourage people to get involved can inspire their participants to

¹⁰ Tait, 'Molecular Collaboration'.

maintain an awkwardly inactive presence within the projects. a.a.s' participants can become collaborators on a project such as *Xe54* just by being present. They can 'prefer not to' engage in any of the interventions, rituals, or other activities whilst maintaining a role in the project. Thus, like *Bartleby*, they maintain an awkward position of both internal influence and external observation.

In my discussion of Hoyle's performance practice I referred to the way that audience members can be committed to Hoyle's performance practice for many years but refuse to act affirmatively towards particular acts in particular performances. Audience members who return to Hoyle's performances again and again maintain a role in affirming, and thus perpetuating an on-going Hoylian project. When such audience members actively and vocally withdraw from acting affirmatively towards a particular act that they find problematic, they are not withdrawing from their commitment to Hoyle's on going practice. Again, a situation is created wherein a participant can be actively participating in a project whilst also withdrawing and reflecting on their role.

In Reactor's projects the paranoia that their slippery relationship to motivation, authorship, and membership can trigger inspires some participants to delve deeper and deeper into their projects. These participants commit to Reactor's implicit encouragement and explicit requests for them to keep interacting, engaging in a multitude of different activities and repeatedly returning to a project over the course of several days. This commitment can be motivated by the desire to figure out what exactly is being committed to. Participants

become complicit in the perpetuation of the systems and structures Reactor devise through their investigations into those systems and structures. Again this exemplifies a position of simultaneous immersion and externalisation, diving deeper into a system of participation and interactivity whilst continually questioning that system and your role within it.

Again, the contribution made to the discourses around the social turn in art and performance relates primarily to methodology. Each of the critical observations and arguments made by the theorists and critics that address the ethics, politics, and aesthetic of participatory art and performance emerge through a position of an outsider. Whether the writers have participated in these projects or not, their writing positions them as critical observers who maintain a distance from the projects they address. This perpetuates the idea that it is only possible to diagnose and critically respond to a situation from the outside. My thesis demonstrates that this is not the case, and that awkwardness plays a key role in triggering and facilitating diagnosis and critique from the inside.

Fifthly, awkwardness is great, even when it emerges as a contingent result of particular individuals responding to particular situations. a.a.s do not pursue awkwardness, but their approach does heighten the potential for it to be produced. In my experience, when such awkwardness does emerge it is embraced as material for the project and allowed to guide its development into something new. This connects a.a.s' relationship to awkwardness to Hoyle's and Reactor's. Unlike Hoyle and Reactor, a.a.s do not strategically

trigger awkward situations. However, Hoyle, Reactor *and* a.a.s all embrace awkwardness once it occurs, allowing it to spread through the actions and interactions of their projects and impact upon the way performances and events unfold. This means they also embrace individuals, like myself, who have an occasional awkward mode of being. My modes of interaction and my contributions are not overlooked or ignored because of a predetermined idea of relevancy and an instinctive urge to bypass or quell awkwardness. By dismissing or overlooking the awkwardness that can arise in any participatory performance or art project, the discourses around the social turn in art and performance (and the performances and projects they focus on) risk excluding those who might trigger such awkwardness.

Sixthly, awkwardness in participatory performance is great because it is entwined with the overlapping experience of pleasures and anxiety in response to our affirmation of acts and causes we do not necessarily comfortably agree with. Affirming awkwardly means maintaining a critical relationship with these acts and causes whilst not disavowing our unavoidable role in their perpetuation. I have demonstrated the ways in which Hoyle immerses his audiences in a productively troubled menagerie of affirmation, allegiance, responsibility and complicity (Chapter 4). They are coerced into participating in the perpetuation of a multi-faceted 'cause' that flickers ambiguously between a rampant and addictive experientialism, a relentless celebration of the marginalised and the excluded, and a ceaseless rage against the oppressively normative and the damagingly judgemental. Consequently, rampant ambiguity and contradiction emerge as causes

themselves, linking the ethics of Hoyle's practice to a.a.s, whom stubbornly dedicate themselves to the cause of avoiding singular causes. For Reactor, participants determine the key cause of the project through the decisions they make as they interact and the conclusions they come to through their investigations.

Approaches to ethics and politics in the discourses around the social turn in art and performance tend to focus on projects with a fixed relationship to a clearly defined cause. Santiago Sierra aims to expose problems around labour, delegation and immigration. WochenKlausur base each of their projects around an ameliorative response to a specific, concrete cause that relates to the location in which they are working. Other projects, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's relational installations, are not rooted in a cause, but act as open invitations to convivially interact around a loosely defined activity, such as eating. The projects I discuss each develop and maintain an awkward relationship with the idea of causes, producing a tension and ambiguity that is overlooked or dismissed in the discourses around the social turn in art and performance.

Seventhly, awkwardness is great when it disrupts the dominating affective tones of a social situation. When Hoyle's behaviour shifts abruptly from antagonism to conviviality, and vice versa (Chapter 4), he displays an awkward relationship with what Ngai describes as 'tone': 'a feeling which is perceived rather than felt and whose very *nonfelnness* is perceived'.¹¹ In

¹¹ Ngai, p. 76.

writings on the social turn in art and performance ‘conviviality’ and ‘antagonism’ are often identified based on the perceptions of those outside of the artworks and performances addressed. Hoyle disrupts these perceptions and challenges their authority through awkward outbursts and shifts that remind us that within either convivial, or antagonistic set-ups individuals are experiencing a range of fluxing feelings. His outbursts illustrate the way in which the organization of social experiences around pre-determined ‘tones’ (i.e. conviviality or antagonism) excludes or represses any felt responses that are in tension with those tones.

Reactor remind us that convivial relations with others are unavoidably ‘complex and dirty’.¹² Their awkward facilitation of neighbourly encounters confront us with the domesticating and diluting consequences of disavowing that complexity and dirt (Chapter 5). a.a.s are aware of the demands on artists to facilitate uncomplicated relations between collaborators and participants. Tait writes that:

A project’s success is defined by its ability to build consensus and to produce a participatory community in the work, and host galleries want this to emerge smoothly and with minimum demands on them. This means artists are encouraged to confine themselves to convivial relationships that make few demands of their participants and remain within the parameters of what is comfortable for everyone.¹³

In response to this, Tait implies his own position on the efficacy of awkwardness, arguing that:

¹² Mel Jordan, ‘Ivan’s Dogs, We Provide the Smiles: Interview with Mel Jordan,’ *Reactor 2006-2011* (Reactor, 2012 [on DVD]).

¹³ Tait, ‘Molecular Collaboration’.

[A]n art practice that stays within acceptable boundaries of what is comfortable, comprehensible and safe for its audience, participants or co-participants does not fulfill what for Félix Guattari is the main characteristic of art, that it be a technology for transformation.¹⁴

For me, even a willfully antagonistic practice can become ‘comfortable, comprehensible and safe’ when participants understand that antagonism is intended and that any deviations from it are unintended and unwelcome. The awkwardness of a.a.s’, Hoyle’s, and Reactor’s projects often arises through an uncertainty around how participants should be affected by the project. It is unclear whether they should be feeling antagonized, entertained, befriended or provoked. This uncertainty is often generated by the temporary nature of any particular quality of interactivity.

Shannon Jackson observes the problematic polarizations that Bishop relies on to build her critique of the social turn in art and performance. She names these as ‘1) social incorporation versus social antagonism; 2) legibility versus illegibility; 3) radically functional versus radically nonfunctional; 4) artistic heteronomy versus artistic autonomy’.¹⁵ Throughout my thesis I discuss the ways in which awkwardness arises as a consequence of these polarizations becoming blurred. In Chapter 1 I demonstrated that the dominant arguments around the ethics and aesthetics of participatory art and performance also

¹⁴ Tait, ‘Molecular Collaboration’.

¹⁵ Shannon Jackson, ‘Social Practice’, in ‘P-S’, *Performance Research*, 11:3, (2006) 87-126; ‘What is the “Social” in Social Practice?: comparing experiments in performance’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136-150 (115).

often rely on a polarization of conviviality versus antagonism. This assumes that a participant or performer cannot or will not impact upon the convivial or antagonistic tone of a performance or artwork, shifting it to the other or contributing to a multiplicity or layering of differing experiences and affects. This is another oversight of the discourses around the social turn in art and performance that relates to awkwardness being overlooked.

Finally, awkwardness is great because it reminds us of the potential fragility and fallibility of authoritative Others. In the conclusion of Chapter 3 I suggested that the awkwardness that might arise in response to a.a.s' Bartleby-like withdrawal relates to the possibility that it emerges from a difficult subjective disposition. We might read Bartleby's withdrawal as a strategic act of resistance when in fact it is a consequence of depression or an inability to comfortably contribute or interact with others. Similarly, David Hoyle's frequent and open reference to his own struggles with mental health problematizes the framing of his self-destructive acts as an example of Antigonian ethics. When awkwardness arises in a Reactor project it could be a result of authority being handed over to someone who has only just joined the project as a participant, not a carefully manipulated scenario to instil paranoia. In *Enjoy Your Symptoms!* Slavoj Žižek describes a scene from Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* in which a 'split' is caused by a 'mistaken gaze':¹⁶

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptoms! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p. 5.

[T]he tramp, on the run from the police, finds himself on a rope at the top of the circus tent; he starts to gesticulate wildly, trying to keep his balance, while the audience laughs and applauds, mistaking his desperate struggle for survival for a comedian's virtuosity – the origin of comedy is to be sought precisely in such blindness, unawareness of the tragic reality of a situation.¹⁷

When awkwardness occurs in participatory performance it has the potential to trigger the idea that participants are making a similar mistake, misreading an artist's or performer's struggle as a strategic attempt to be challenging. We are confronted with the possibility that those facilitating, guiding or triggering our interactions are struggling with an incapability or personal limitation. Reactor play with this idea when they construct fictional, farcical big Others (Big Lizard, Uncle Commi, The Green Man) that we are told are in charge of the project. Such awkwardness intervenes in our ability to continue confidently delegating responsibility for our participation onto the artist. Participants are confronted with the possibility that there is no guarantor for their actions and interactions. The ambiguity around whether awkwardness emerges through intentionality or incapability intervenes in participants understanding of the extent of their responsibilities – for themselves, for each other, and for the success of the performance or artwork that they are participating in. Here awkwardness not only confronts us with our complicity in a situation, but signals the potential that we might need to take charge, or that we may unwittingly already be in a position of authority.

I end with this approach to awkwardness in relation to authority, capability and responsibility for two reasons. Firstly, because its contributions to the

¹⁷ Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptoms!*, p. 17.

discourse around the social turn in art and performance exemplify the key challenges that this thesis makes overall in response to that discourse.

Throughout this thesis I have identified blind spots that arises from reductive approaches to selecting and analysing participatory art and performance.

Here this reductive approach entails the framing of a performance or artwork as being either authoritatively managed so that participants have few responsibilities, or loosely facilitated so that participants have many responsibilities. This overlooks the possibility that a participant's sense of responsibility can be triggered by a breakdown of authority and management, of which awkwardness can be both an instigator and an outcome. It also risks overlooking or excluding participatory art and performance that is created and managed by individuals for whom there is a heightened risk of a personal struggle triggering such a breakdown. I, for example, might struggle to avoid a breakdown of management due to the difficulties I experience imposing order on activities as a result of my dyspraxia. This is another example of how the dismissal or overlooking of awkwardness might lead to the exclusion of individuals with awkward modes of being involving themselves in participatory art and performance.

This reference to dyspraxia links to the second reason for ending with this discussion of awkwardness in relation to authority. In the final section of this thesis I challenge Bishop's critique of participatory performance that does not adequately cater for secondary viewers. However, I also understand that my own descriptions of participatory performances act as links between

participatory performances and secondary viewers. For this reason I conclude this section by proposing that an ideal account of the efficacy of awkwardness should itself embrace ambiguities around authority, expertise and capability. Finally, returning to comments made in the preface to this thesis, I suggest that dysraxia might offer an ideal way to do that.

Love Thy Secondary Viewer? No Thanks!

I hope to have demonstrated that, the best way to experience and account for the efficacies of awkwardness in participatory art and performance summarised above, is to participate. These are not experiences to be perceived, diagnosed, and critiqued from outside the project, but require our immersion in them. This assertion goes against one of Bishop's key arguments, which is that participatory performances should ensure they accommodate the 'secondary' viewer, who experiences the documentation of the project after the participation is over.¹⁸

In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop describes the 'pitfalls of so much participatory art, in which there is no space for critical reflection'.¹⁹ In fact, she sees the 'central project' of her book as being 'to find ways of accounting for participatory art that focuses on the meaning of what it produces, rather than attending solely to process'.²⁰ Following this, she insists upon the necessity of a 'mediating object, concept, image or story' as a 'necessary link between the artist and a

¹⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 264.

²⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 9.

secondary audience'.²¹ My concern is that this secondary mediation encourages, or even relies upon a de-cluttering of the participatory experience. It risks decontaminating interactivity of its awkwardness, or containing that awkwardness in a way that undoes its impact. As this thesis contains a series of accounts of awkward participatory performances that act as a mediation between my experiences and a secondary reader, I will use these final paragraphs to address the potential pitfalls of my own approach and suggest possible alternatives that will influence future projects.

In the essay on neighbourly love that had a key role in chapter 5 of this thesis, Žižek describes a problematic, 'pseudo-Freudian' approach to accounting for our actions and experiences.²² This approach is exemplified by John Gray and his work on the Oprah Winfrey show:

What he [Gray] proposes is that, after regressing to his primal traumatic scene and thus directly confronting it, the subject should, under the therapist's guidance, "rewrite" this scene, this ultimate fantasmatic framework of his subjectivity, in a more "positive," benign, and productive narrative.²³

The problems with this method of developing productive agency over our past are, I would argue, similar to the problem of becoming overly concerned about mediating participatory projects for secondary viewers. It is not an issue of being 'untrue' or of constructing an acceptable version of events that over-

²¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 9.

²² Slavoj Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence', in *The Neighbor: Three Enquiries in Political Theology*, Kenneth Reinhard, Eric L. Santner, and Slavoj Žižek (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp.134-190, (p. 136).

²³ Slavoj Žižek, 'Neighbors', p. 136.

write what ‘really went on’. It is that awkwardness risks being neatened out, contained, or, as is often the case in story-telling, reconstituted as comedy.

This loss is described in Žižek’s own critique of Gray’s method:

What disappears in this total availability of the past to its subsequent retroactive rewriting are not primarily the “hard facts,” but the Real traumatic encounter whose structuring role in the subject’s psychic economy forever resists its symbolic rewriting.²⁴

In his description of the Lacanian *Objet Petit a* Fink refers to a Real that ‘remains, insists, and ex-sists after or despite symbolization’.²⁵ This ‘Real after Symbolisation is written as “R2”’.²⁶ For Žižek, pseudo-Freudian approaches, such as that exemplified by Gray, act to diminish, deny or exclude this ‘R2’ element. Following this, my own concern is that the mediation of participatory performance encouraged by Bishop might diminish, deny or exclude the awkwardness that could remain after or despite that mediation.

Therefore I propose that any future attempts to mediate, repackage, or theorise an awkward participatory or collaborative experience should accommodate what I will call an ‘AWK2’, taking my lead from Lacan’s ‘R2’. ‘AWK2’ is a trace or element of awkwardness that remains and insists after the process of documentation, mediation or theorisation of awkward situations. The dyspraxic C/PPaR approach I have taken throughout this thesis (see my Preface, and the ‘Methodology’ section in my Introduction) is related to this attempt to have a fidelity to the maintenance of this ‘AWK2’. I

²⁴ Žižek, ‘Neighbors’, p. 136.

²⁵ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (New Jersey and West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 83.

²⁶ Fink, p. 27.

propose that if awkward participatory performance must be mediated for a secondary viewer (or reader), it should be done awkwardly.

The aim of the embracing of 'AWK2' would be to propagate the kind of cacophony of responses to awkward participatory performance that Žižek observed after the 2011 UK riots in which we see

[S]ociologists, intellectuals, and commentators trying to understand and to help. Trying desperately to translate the protests back into their familiar language, they only succeeded in obfuscating the key enigma the riots presented.²⁷

Thus I am not entirely disparaging of the shift from experiences of immersed participation to critically appreciable documentation. I am, however, suggesting that the experience of the 'secondary audience' should also be awkward. This would mean drawing them into an experience of ambiguity, disruption and difficulty that reflects the experiences described. Like the participants of an awkward participatory performance, they should be offered the opportunity of thinking through a situation from the inside. Thus such writing would aim to immerse the reader in awkwardness at the same time as inviting them to reflect on the efficacy of that awkwardness.

In the last paragraphs of the previous section I argued that the efficacy of awkwardness could relate to an ambiguity around the capabilities and intentions of those in authority in a situation. I suggested that those with an awkward mode of being are particularly adept at producing such ambiguity.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 54.

Thus, in order to pursue my aim of developing accounts of awkward participatory performance that are themselves awkward, committing to the maintenance of 'AWK2', I would offer the reader experiences of disruptions that would prompt them to question my own authority and capability. Such writing would aim to challenge the reader's understanding of whether my style was intentionally performative or rooted in a personal limitation or dysfunction. This is why, in written projects on awkwardness that follow this one, I aim to experiment with allowing my dyspraxia to be less contained and disciplined than it is here. This will produce a series of haphazard accounts of awkwardness that maintain a fidelity to the idea of disrupting experiences of authority and imply that the responsibility for accounting for these awkward moments may lie as much with the reader as the writer. This would reflect the experiences of responsibility triggered in participants involved in awkward participatory performance.

Throughout this thesis I have insisted that awkwardness should not be overlooked or excluded because, firstly, it has particular efficacies, and secondly because such exclusions contribute to, or reinforce barriers to individuals with an awkward mode of being. Following this insistence, future written projects that demand that awkwardness be embraced and appreciated would embrace the awkward outcomes of my own awkward mode of being.

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